

Plato's critique of injustice in the Gorgias and the Republic

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PLATO'S CRITIQUE OF INJUSTICE IN THE *GORGIAS* AND THE *REPUBLIC*

a dissertation

by

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Plato's Critique of Injustice in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*

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No rational decision can be made concerning how to live without confronting the problem of justice—both what it is and whether it is good to be just. In this essay I examine Plato's articulation of these problems in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. Through detailed analyses of Socrates' exchanges with several interlocutors, I establish, first, that despite some real and apparent differences, all the interlocutors share the same fundamental conception of justice, which could be called justice as fairness or reciprocal equality (*to ison*). The core of justice lies in refraining from *pleonexia* (seeking to benefit oneself at the expense of another). Second, according to this view, the practice of justice is not intrinsically profitable; it is valuable only as a means to the acquisition or enjoyment of other, material goods. This conception thus implies that committing successful injustice is often more profitable than being just. Third, the critics of justice recognize and openly acknowledge this fact; hence, their position is more coherent than common opinion. Fourth, the core of the Socratic defense of justice lies in the claims that the practice of *pleonexia* is incompatible with the possession of a well-ordered soul and that the possession of a well-ordered soul is necessary for happiness. Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, Socrates does not argue that justice, as it is commonly conceived, is intrinsically profitable. He is able to refute the critics of justice because the latter lack a coherent understanding of the human good. Finally, Socrates' defense of justice nonetheless remains incomplete because he deliberately refrains from giving a sufficient account of the nature of the soul and its good.

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Introduction:

The Problem of Justice

The following essay examines Plato's presentation of the arguments in favor of living an unjust or immoral life and the Socratic response to these arguments, as these are found in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*. The problem of justice is clearly important. It is normally taken for granted that being just or moral, however understood, forms a necessary part of any genuinely good human life, however understood. In other words, it is taken as a mark of good human beings that their pursuit of their own personal good is in some way restrained, tempered, enlightened, or re-channeled by a concern, or at the very least a respect, for the rights and interests of others. Yet this can be questioned. Why should a rational, capable person accept any limits on his pursuit of the good other than those dictated by calculation and necessity? Is it rational to choose to have less of what is good than one can get? And why should one person's good contain any essential, non-instrumental reference to the good of someone else? In sum, why is it good to be good? According to the arguments presented by Socrates' interlocutors, it is not.

As can be seen, the question, "Why be just?" or, "Why be moral?" is an essential part of the broader question, "How should I live?" or "What is the best way of life?" In pursuing the latter questions one must necessarily put the goodness of justice in question because any radical questioning cannot merely assume that justice or morality forms an intrinsic part of a good human life—nor, for that matter, can it merely assume that it knows *what* justice is. The *Gorgias* and the *Republic* have the virtue of vividly calling

one's attention to these facts and presenting the problem of justice explicitly and from several perspectives animated by various concerns.

The ultimate purpose of an investigation such as this can only be to understand as well as possible the Socratic-Platonic answer to the problem of justice. In order to understand the answer, however, one must understand the problem that it is the answer to. Thus, one must pay close attention to the nature and the basis of the case for the unjust life as Plato presents it. I will argue that the critics of justice (and the defenders, with the exception of Socrates) all share the same fundamental conception of justice, which I will usually refer to as justice as fairness.¹ (The Greek word is *to ison*.) The fundamental charge leveled by the critics (Callicles and Thrasymachus) is that once one understands the nature, origin, and purpose of this conception of justice, one sees that there is no good reason to refrain from doing injustice in cases where one has the capacity to escape punishment.² Hence, their critiques of justice are also critiques of law (or convention, *nomos*), since in human life the demands of justice are always embodied in the first place in the laws of the community in which one lives. They ground their condemnation of justice in a conception of the human good, carried over from ordinary opinion, which places happiness primarily in the enjoyment of bodily and material goods, as well as in the power to secure these goods. The more of these goods one has, the happier one is; to acquire these goods, one must take them from others (or, in the case of

¹ I do not mean to imply that this conception of justice has anything in common with conception of "justice as fairness" described by John Rawls in his *A Theory of Justice*. "Fairness" is, in my opinion, simply the best catch-all English translation of the Greek word "*to ison*" (which can also be translated "equality"). Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 5.

² As we shall see, Callicles' and Thrasymachus' accounts differ in significant ways, but they share this core.

power, one necessarily enjoys them at the expense of another). Hence, true well-being requires injustice.

Socrates' responses must be understood in light of these particular challenges. Socrates certainly defends justice against the attacks against it leveled by Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus, but one must pay careful attention to the *manner* in which he defends justice and the particular (and deliberate) limitations of that defense. As we shall see, Socrates clearly indicates that the ordinary conception of justice *cannot* be defended on its own terms. In fact, the defenses of justice in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* are simultaneously critiques of the conception of happiness or the human good presupposed by the ordinary conception of justice. If the human good is what it is ordinarily taken to be, then the critics of justice are correct. That is the implication of Socrates' arguments. In both dialogues, however, Socrates takes great pains to create the impression that he is *vindicating* ordinary justice. The *Republic* allows us to account for why he does so.

Socrates' own arguments are intended to indicate, however, that justice can be truly defended only when it is shown that injustice (in the ordinary sense of *pleonexia*, or benefiting oneself at the expense of others) is incompatible with the pursuit of the true human good. All of the critics of justice (as well as some of the defenders) believe that *pleonexia* is more profitable than fairness. When Socrates defends justice, he does so by attacking this belief, which is the root of the problem. To do so, Socrates must present an alternative account of the human good. At the core of Socrates' conception of the good lies the notion of "the good order of the soul." Socrates' basic argument is that possessing a well-ordered soul is necessary for happiness, but is incompatible with the

practice of *pleonexia*. To indicate this, in both dialogues Socrates goes so far as to call this good order “justice” (that is, the opposite of *pleonexia*). I will show that Socrates’ argument in the *Gorgias* that justice is the good order of the soul is so abstract, formal, and elliptical that it is utterly unconvincing. The *Republic* provides a more adequate argument, because it introduces a more detailed account of the internal order of the soul (the famous tripartite soul), and because it introduces the topic of the philosophic life. In the light of the good available to the philosopher, and the order of soul necessary to pursue that good, Socrates is able to prove that injustice is never more profitable than justice because the practice of injustice is incompatible with the philosopher’s life. Socrates then uses the elements of his defense of this kind of justice (justice as the good order of the soul) to deliver a limited defense of justice in the ordinary sense (and the law that instantiates it).

I have structured this essay around Socrates’ interlocutors. The first two chapters discuss the critique and defense of justice in the *Gorgias*. Chapter one treats Socrates’ exchanges with Gorgias (449a-461b) and Polus (461b-481b). This lays the ground for Socrates’ confrontation with Callicles (481b-527e), which is the subject of chapter two. At the end of chapter two, I take preliminary stock of the problem—both the critique and Socrates’ response.

Chapters three through five treat the *Republic*. In chapter three, I explore the inadequacies of the common conception of justice as these are revealed in Socrates’ cross-examinations of Cephalus (328b-331d) and Polemarchus (331e-336a). In the

fourth chapter, I discuss Thrasymachus' critique of justice and Socrates' response to it (336b-354c). At the end of chapter four, I assess the problem of justice and the Socratic response as they have come to light in these four chapters, and I draw some preliminary conclusions.

In the final chapter (chapter five), I discuss two things: the resuscitated critique of justice delivered by Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II (357a-367e); and Socrates' response to this critique in the rest of the *Republic*. I pay special attention to the discussion of the virtues in Book IV (427c-444e), the discussion of philosophy spread throughout Books V-VII, and the final proofs of the superiority of justice to injustice found in Book IX (576b-588a). I then draw my final conclusions concerning the nature of the critique of justice and Socrates' response. I argue that the *Republic* presents a more comprehensive response than the *Gorgias*, but that the response is not demonstrative and is even, one could say, ungrounded, since the nature of the soul, the good, and even the philosophic life remain only figuratively presented and, hence, obscure.

Chapter One

The Critique of Justice in the *Gorgias*³ (1):

Gorgias and Polus (449a-481b)

This chapter and the next will concern themselves with the problem of justice as it is confronted in the *Gorgias*. The next chapter will treat Socrates' exchange with Calicles, who explicitly attacks justice. The present chapter will show how the problem of justice first emerges through Socrates' previous conversations with Gorgias and Polus, since, for our purposes, their essential function in the dialogue is to reveal the problems that Calicles attempts to solve through his own account of justice.

The "problem of justice" is, of course, twofold: what justice is, and whether it is good to be just. The *Gorgias* focuses thematically only on the latter problem. The dialogue presents the problem of the goodness of justice in the following way. Common opinion is ambivalent about the value of being a just person. Being just is considered noble and admirable, while committing injustice and being unjust are considered shameful; yet injustice, at least when successful, appears to be more profitable than strict observance of justice. Why, then, is it better to be just than unjust, as is suggested by the praise of justice and blame of injustice? *Is it better?* It further becomes clear that this ambivalence follows from commonly-held notions about the nature of happiness, since happiness, as it is ordinarily conceived, does not seem to require the virtue of justice.

³ For the Greek text of the *Gorgias*, I have used Dodds 1959; all citations are to Nichols' (1998a) translation. Where, in the course of discussion, I render Greek words differently from him, I will make it obvious enough.

Gorgias hints at these problems, but only hints. Polus attempts to defend the claim that injustice is profitable, but fails because he is unable to account for why doing injustice ought to be considered shameful—or even whether it really ought to be. In both exchanges, it is clearly revealed that Gorgias and Polus are giving voice to commonly-held notions about justice and happiness. Their incoherencies are, therefore, those of common opinion itself. As we shall see, Callicles' critique of justice begins with his attempt to explain the origin of these incoherent common opinions, and his own account of justice is intended to straighten out these inconsistencies.

1. Gorgias (449a-461b)

Just as Gorgias and Polus together prepare the way for Callicles, Gorgias prepares the way for Polus. He does so by hinting at opinions that only Polus will state and defend explicitly. Without quite intending to do so, Gorgias' boasts about the power of rhetoric, combined with his unwillingness actually to praise or counsel injustice, reveal the popular ambivalence towards the value of justice. Gorgias merely reveals this ambivalence, however. His unwillingness to say anything shameful renders him unfit for exploring the problems he has exposed.

1.1. The Nature of Rhetoric (449a-455a)

The problem of justice emerges from out of a conversation about the nature and benefit of the art of rhetoric. In the first part of his exchange with Gorgias (449a-454a), Socrates attempts to elicit from Gorgias a definition of rhetoric: what its subject matter

is, or what the rhetor⁴ knows by virtue of knowing rhetoric (cf. 449d, 451d). Gorgias first answers Socrates that rhetoric is the science concerned with speeches (449e) and which achieves its whole effect through speech alone without any additional handiwork (450b-c). Socrates easily shows Gorgias that both of these descriptions could apply equally well to other arts that Gorgias is avowedly unwilling to call rhetorical arts (449e-450b, 450c-451a). When Socrates attempts to get a clear answer for the third time, Gorgias tries to specify the subject matter of rhetoric by saying that its speeches concern “the greatest of human affairs...and the best” (451d), but Socrates asserts that this is still not clear, and that it is controversial to boot. He invokes the authority of a popular drinking song which states that the best human goods (in descending order) are health, beauty, and wealth.⁵ These goods are supplied, respectively, by the arts of medicine, gymnastics, and moneymaking. Socrates consequently conjures up a doctor, a gymnastic trainer, and a moneymaker, and asks on his own and their behalf what good the art of rhetoric could provide that exceeds the goods of health, beauty, and wealth (451e-452d). Gorgias’ response supplies the first glimpse of the problem of justice. Rhetoric, he says, supplies that good

which is in truth...the greatest good and the cause both of freedom for human beings themselves and at the same time of rule over others in each man’s own city....[This good consists of] being able to persuade by speeches judges in the law court, councilors in the council, assemblymen

⁴ I follow Nichols (1998a, p. 28 n. 12) in translating *rhētōr* “rhetor” in order to preserve its flexibility. As Nichols notes, the term can refer to a professional rhetorician or to a political orator or politician. Often, the usage applies equally to both cases.

⁵ Dodds 1959, p.200 supplies the complete song.

in the assembly, and in every other gathering whatsoever, when there is a political gathering. And indeed with this power you will have the doctor as your slave, and the trainer as your slave; and that moneymaker of yours will be plainly revealed to be making money for another and not for himself, but for you who can speak and persuade multitudes. (452d-e)⁶

In other words, rhetoric is the best and most beneficial art because it renders its practitioner politically all-powerful within his own community through the power to persuade. This is beneficial, Gorgias implies, because it effectively gives one the power to do whatever one wants, which includes (he seems to suggest) being able to enslave or exploit one's fellow citizens for personal gain.

Gorgias is clearly engaging in some boasting here, most likely, as Nichols (1998b, p. 133) and Stauffer (2006, pp. 26-27, 30) have argued, in order to advertise his wares and attract some potential students in the audience (cf. Socrates' statement at 455c-d). After all, Socrates has just asked him to defend his art. The character of Gorgias' boast is troubling, however. He suggests that the best way to secure one's own good is to rule others while not being ruled oneself, and he claims that rhetoric supplies this ability.⁷ But his language of "enslavement" clearly suggests that a rhetor could find it beneficial to use his power *unjustly*. He will rule for his own sake, not for the sake of the ruled; at the very least, the rhetor's priorities will be set by his self-interest. Gorgias does not state this explicitly, but it is clearly implied in his language, and would hardly be missed by his

⁶ This statement on Gorgias' part is confusing, since the power of rhetoric is clearly a *means* to freedom and rule, yet he does not call the latter the greatest good, but rather the power to persuade. Ends and means seem mixed up. One can say at least that the ends mentioned would be the goals of most of his students. As for the relation between freedom and rule, Irwin 1979, p. 116 is very instructive.

⁷ Again, see Irwin 1979, p. 116; see also *Philebus* 58a-b.

audience. He has come just shy of saying that the greatest good is to be able to exploit one's fellow citizens with impunity. Further, he clearly believes that many people in the audience will be *attracted* by these boasts, which reflects the opinion that many or most people believe that injustice can be profitable and, thus, are ambivalent about the value of justice.

In sum, Gorgias has shown himself to believe that rhetoric is greatly powerful but not necessarily just, and he has advertised rhetoric in a manner that appeals to unjust motives. Gorgias will move to disown such notions (starting at 456c), but Polus and Callicles will embrace them.

Socrates does not explore these implications of Gorgias' speech. Rather, he seeks further clarification about the particular nature of the persuasion which rhetoric produces (452e-454a), asking again *what* rhetoric persuades people about (454a). Gorgias responds with a narrower and less boastful version of his previous answer: rhetoric produces "persuasion in the law courts and in other mobs, as I was saying just a moment ago, and about those things that are just and unjust" (454b).⁸ Gorgias' reference to his previous answer suggests, however, that he does not believe that rhetoric persuades mobs *only* in matters of justice; his initial statement had not been that limited. Still, this is the first definite subject that Gorgias offers, which suggests the prominence of the topic within the discipline of rhetoric. What remains puzzling at this point is how this relates to the semi-tyrannical ambitions to which he had previously appealed. Rhetoric may

⁸ Nichols (1998a, p. 35. n. 24) suggests that this further limitation is yet again in the interests of advertising, since to enjoy success in the law courts was a prime reason for people to go to teachers of rhetoric.

speak about justice, but it has been suggested that rhetors themselves may not use their art justly.

Socrates does not follow up this potential contradiction between the subject matter of rhetoric and the motives of its practitioners. Instead, he first obtains Gorgias' agreement that rhetoric persuades audiences without actually teaching them the truth of what they are persuaded (454c-e). Rhetoric produces belief, but not knowledge, unlike, for example, mathematics, which persuades its students by teaching them the truth regarding its subject matter. Rhetoric produces *merely* persuasion. Socrates hastens to defend rhetoric on this score, suggesting that the rhetor (although he might wish to) could not possibly teach such great things to so many people in such a short time, as Gorgias agrees (455a).⁹ Gathering up what has been said, Socrates offers the following definition of rhetoric: "Rhetoric, then, as seems likely, is a craftsman of belief-inspiring but not didactic persuasion about the just and the unjust" (455a), a definition to which Gorgias does not object.

1.2. The Power of Rhetoric (455a-461b)

Apparently satisfied for the moment, Socrates leads the conversation from the nature of rhetoric to the topic of its power. Expressing perplexity, he asks Gorgias about what matters a practitioner of rhetoric is able to advise the city (455a-d). If rhetors are experts regarding the just and unjust, presumably they will not counsel the city in matters that fall under the expertise of some other art, for example, in matters of shipbuilding or

⁹ Cf. Nichols 1998a, p. 37 n.28 on this matter.

strategy. In those cases, presumably the shipbuilder or the general would be the relevant expert, not the rhetor (455b-c). Socrates asks whether this is not the case. To give Gorgias an incentive to answer, Socrates implores him to consider himself asked not just by Socrates but also by the numerous potential students in the audience who are too bashful to ask Gorgias, on their own account, what benefit will accrue to them by learning his art, and about what they will be able to advise the city (455c-d). Socrates' question is, of course, ambiguous. At first, he seems to be asking what benefits rhetors can confer *on their own cities*. When asking on behalf of potential students, however, he seems to be asking what benefit rhetoric can confer *on its practitioner*. As we have already seen (at 452e), these questions are certainly not identical.

In response to Socrates' question, Gorgias makes even bigger and more dubious boasts on behalf of rhetoric than he did before. In trying to "uncover...the whole power of rhetoric" (455d), he says, in effect, that rhetoric is *all-powerful* (456a-c, 457a-b). Rhetoric, he says, "gathers together and holds under itself all powers, so to speak" (456a; see 452e). As an example, he offers his own ability to persuade his brother's patients to submit to painful medical treatment, and to do so making use only of the art of rhetoric (456b). Shifting from the greater power of the rhetor over patients to the greater power of the rhetor over doctors, he asserts that, if a city ever had occasion to choose a public doctor, the rhetor could get himself chosen over an actual doctor every time, if he wished (456b-c). Broadening his claims even further, he asserts that, if a rhetor "should contest against any other craftsman whatsoever, the rhetorician rather than anyone else would persuade them to choose himself. For there is nothing about which the rhetorician would

not speak more persuasively than any other of the craftsmen in a multitude” (456c).¹⁰ In short, the rhetor will be all-powerful in any matter that relies on gaining the consent of the multitude. Note that Gorgias never says that the rhetor is especially qualified to give good counsel or desires to give good counsel, reinforcing the moral ambiguity of his art.

Having said these things, Gorgias apparently becomes aware that he is in danger of crossing the line into disrespectability and engendering suspicion and hostility towards himself and his art. Consequently, he quickly moves to qualify his previous claims.

Rhetoric, he says, must be used like any other competitive skill. That is, it must be used *justly* (456c-d). The same holds for rhetoric as for wrestling, boxing, or fighting in heavy armor. Teachers of these arts impart the skill to their pupils with the intention that the pupils will use this skill only for just purposes, against enemies or wrongdoers, and for self-defense, not for starting trouble (456d). If some pupil abuses the art, using it unjustly against friends or family, the art is not to blame, nor is the teacher, but rather the pupil, since it is the pupil who has perverted the art which the master had imparted for good use.¹¹ So, just as no one gets angry at or exiles boxing instructors because of the abuses of their students, no one should blame or punish teachers of rhetoric if one of their students happens to use it for unjust purposes. In such cases, the just thing is to blame and to punish the student (456e-457c).

¹⁰ Cf. 457a-b: “...the rhetor has power to speak against all men and about everything, so as to be more persuasive in multitudes about, in brief, whatever he wishes.” This clearly reveals that Gorgias does *not* believe that the subject matter of rhetoric’s speeches is limited to the topic of justice.

¹¹ Incidentally, we can infer Gorgias’ understanding of what justice is from these statements. It seems to be the fairly typical mixture: justice consists of obeying the law, helping friends and family, harming enemies and wrongdoers, and, in general, respecting the property and persons of others and the customs of the community regarding what is owed to whom. We shall see that Polus holds the same conception of justice. Callicles will attempt to clarify it and reveal its origins—before rejecting it.

The self-interest in these lines is as evident as his boasts were earlier. Even as Gorgias parades before potential students the promise of a remarkable, near-tyrannical power, he at the same time disowns any responsibility whatsoever for those students who might actually use this power for unjust purposes. Had Gorgias not already made his boasts, one might be inclined to consider his current qualification reasonable. After all, almost every art is liable to some kind of abuse, and powerful arts are by that very fact liable to dangerous abuse. Gorgias is aware, however, that any teacher who might appear to *encourage* such abuse would immediately become suspect. While he has not gone so far as to encourage an unjust use of rhetoric, neither has he (until this opportune moment) given any evidence of his intention that his skill to be used justly—if anything, he has hinted at the contrary.

More importantly, Gorgias has not said *why* the art of rhetoric ought to be used only justly. He does not say whether rhetoric ought to be used thus because it is actually in the rhetor's own interest to be just, or because there is some standard higher than private interest that rhetors (like other human beings) are bound to respect. He has shown where the temptation to injustice comes from. He has not shown why justice ought to have precedence over self-interest. Thus, after having hinted at how profitable the unjust use of rhetoric might be, he merely defers to the decent opinion that, for whatever reason, one ought always to be just. This question will receive greater treatment once Polus joins the conversation.

We have now seen enough of Socrates' conversation with Gorgias to substantiate my main contention about this part of the dialogue. The speeches of Gorgias himself

reveal that at least part (and perhaps the greater part) of the appeal of rhetoric rests on the premise that injustice can be highly profitable. After all, what concern would lead students of rhetoric to use their “competitive” abilities unjustly, if not in pursuit of some perceived benefit? The attraction of rhetoric, Gorgias supposes, lies in the first instance in the power that it confers on its possessors, and this power is beneficial, at least in part, because it renders its possessor able to dispense with respect for justice. This theme will also receive further treatment when Polus enters the conversation.

The remainder of Socrates’ conversation with Gorgias (457c-461b) consists of Socrates’ cross-examination of Gorgias’ claims. Its details are not particularly important for our purposes. Partly, it merely makes explicit what was already implicit in what Gorgias has said: for example, that rhetoric enables its practitioners to speak persuasively without really knowing what they are talking about, provided that the people addressed are as ignorant the rhetors are (458e-459c). Socrates’ refutation hinges partly on Gorgias making one apparent exception to this: rhetoricians must truly know the good, just, and noble in order to practice rhetoric. In these matters, they are not ignorant, Gorgias implies (at 460a; cf. 449e). It is true, however, that this categorical formulation comes from Socrates. He obtains Gorgias’ assent, but Gorgias himself had offered only that he would teach the good, just, and noble to any student who comes to him who “happens” not to know such things (again, 460a). This way of speaking on Gorgias’ part suggests that Gorgias assumes that most of his students *will* know such things already, which, in turn, suggests that Gorgias considers knowledge of such things to be readily available and easy to acquire. This implicit assumption will resurface in Socrates’

exchanges with Polus and Callicles. As we shall see, all three interlocutors assume that they know what justice is.

Once Gorgias has admitted that knowledge of the just is necessary in order to learn rhetoric, Socrates obtains his further agreement that anyone who knows the just things is a just person and would never wish to do injustice (460a-c),¹² a conclusion which flatly contradicts Gorgias' previous claim that rhetoric can be used unjustly. Socrates does not hesitate to point this out to Gorgias, and he concludes that this contradiction reveals that they have failed to determine what rhetoric is (460b-461b). Gorgias having been refuted, Polus breaks into the conversation to protest (461b-c).

1.3. Conclusion

In sum, the exchange with Gorgias introduces the core of the problem of justice, which is the belief that, even if committing injustice is wrong and justly punished, it nevertheless can be highly beneficial. Gorgias avers that one should always be just, even if injustice might be more profitable, but not only has he not explained why this is so, he has even revealed (through the character of his defense of rhetoric) that he expects his students to be attracted to learning rhetoric precisely in order to gain the power to commit profitable injustice. The fact that he believes potential students will be attracted by this claim suggests that ambivalence towards justice can be found within ordinary opinion, and not merely in the doctrines of sophists or rhetoricians. Finally, throughout the conversation, Gorgias has assumed that it is obvious what justice is and what it demands.

¹² For why Gorgias might agree to such a strange claim, see Dodds 1959, p. 218, Irwin 1979, pp. 126-28, and Stauffer 2006, pp. 35-36.

We are, therefore, left with the following questions. Is Gorgias right about the general character of justice? Why do people believe that injustice can be profitable? Why do they nonetheless also believe that injustice is shameful? When there is a conflict between justice and self-interest, why should justice be preferred? Or—a question Gorgias’ boasts might suggest—*should* justice always be preferred? These questions will receive further elaboration in Socrates’ exchange with Polus, which in turn, prepares the way for their deeper treatment when Callicles joins the conversation.

2. Polus (461b-481b)

The conversation between Socrates and Polus further elaborates the tension between self-interest and justice that came to light in the previous section. Through an unflattering dismissal of rhetoric, Socrates is able to provoke Polus into defending the power of rhetoric, which in turn forces him to make explicit his belief that it is possible for unjust people to be happy and, indeed, that supremely unjust people are among the happiest of human beings. In this manner, the semi-tyrannical appeal of rhetorical power (to which Gorgias had disingenuously spoken) is laid bare. Further, Socrates frankly acknowledges that almost everybody would agree with Polus. Thus, Polus is here a spokesman for common opinion, thereby revealing more explicitly that common opinion is ambivalent about the value of justice. Finally, in the course of making his claims, Polus begins to uncover the conception of happiness (or the human good) that underlies

the belief that great injustice can be highly profitable, showing why this conception of happiness leads to ambivalence towards justice.

In opposition to Polus' claims, Socrates first expresses and defends his most famous arguments in the *Gorgias*: that committing injustice is more personally harmful than suffering it, and that the greatest evil which can befall a human being is to do injustice and escape punishment (developed 474c-479e). He manages to prove his case and refute Polus through a dubious argument that rests on the premise that justice is nobler (*kallion*) than injustice—or, more precisely, that committing injustice is more shameful (*aischion*) than suffering it. Thus, Polus, like Gorgias, is brought down by a tension between what he believes is good and what he believes is noble or respectable—a tension he proves unable to resolve. Polus' failure, combined with the apparent outrageousness of Socrates' counterclaims and the many dubious assumptions contained in his arguments, provokes Callicles to join the conversation.

I will divide my analysis of this section into three parts: the exchange concerning the nature of rhetoric (462b-466a); the exchange concerning power and justice (466a-474c); and Socrates' proofs for his two claims (474e-481b).

2.1. Rhetoric and Flattery (462b-466a)

The discussion between Polus and Socrates, just as that between the latter and Gorgias, begins on the topic of rhetoric. Polus challenges Socrates to say what *he* thinks rhetoric is. Socrates obliges with a technically obscure but clearly insulting depreciation

of rhetoric as a sham art and species of flattery (*kolakeia*; 463b).¹³ He lumps it together with cookery, cosmetics, and sophistry, none of them proper arts, all of them forms of flattery (463a-c), and denounces all of them as bad and shameful (463d). He then defines rhetoric as “a phantom of a part of politics” (463d), which proves obscure enough to move Gorgias to intervene in order to receive an explanation.

Socrates’ account of the false arts of flattery, and the true arts which they imitate, is obscure, and I will not attempt anything even close to a full interpretation of it. The basic premises of Socrates’ division are as follows: there is a good condition of the body, and there is a good condition of the soul; there is also a specious good condition of body and of soul (463e-464b). The care for the body is divided between two arts: gymnastic training and medicine. The care of the soul, which Socrates calls “the art of politics,” is divided analogously into two arts: lawgiving (parallel to gymnastic training) and justice (parallel to medicine). Alongside these four genuine arts are the four flattering sham arts mentioned above. Corresponding to gymnastics and medicine are cosmetics and cookery; corresponding to lawgiving and justice are sophistic and rhetoric. These sham arts (Socrates calls them “knacks”—*empeiria*, cf. 462c, 465a) pretend to care for the good of their subjects, but in fact they pursue mere pleasure, without regard for the good, and they have no true knowledge of what they are doing and, hence, are not arts.

Socrates’ account is, of course, puzzling in many respects. To begin with, he never describes what the good condition of the soul consists in, nor does he give any kind of detailed description of how lawgiving and justice contribute to it. He does not say

¹³ On the meaning of this term, see Irwin 1979, p. 131 and Taylor 2001, pp. 110 and 110 n. 1. Taylor suggests that it be rendered “humoring the mood of a patron.”

what, precisely, he means by “lawgiving,” nor what he means by “justice,” nor does he explain how they differ from one another.¹⁴ By contrast, he describes in some detail cosmetics and cookery. It is not even clear why *politics* should be described as “the care of the soul.” Nor is it clear that Socrates means by “lawgiving” and “justice” what people would ordinarily take these words to mean, although he apparently wishes to leave the impression that he does. Consequently, the realm of the soul, and hence of politics, is left obscure. At this point, Socrates merely conveys the notion that the genuine arts are concerned with genuine well-being, while the false arts of flattery are base pursuits of mere pleasure.¹⁵ Despite these questions, Socrates has introduced into the conversation two key themes that recur in the dialogue: the soul and its good, and the distinction between pleasure and the good.

Once Socrates lays out this classification, it is dropped entirely until it comes up again well into the discussion with Callicles (at 500a-501c). Only there does it play an important part in the conversation. In the context in which it is delivered, it serves only to provoke Polus to defend rhetoric.

2.2. Power, Benefit, and Justice (466a-474c)

¹⁴ How, exactly, Socrates thinks justice contributes to the care of the soul, and what he means by “justice,” will only begin to become clear later (see 476d-478e).

¹⁵ A claim that, Dodds (1959, p. 227) points out, is complicated by the fact that gymnastic and medicine care for individuals, while lawgiving and justice seem to take their bearing in the first instance by the well-being of communities. Socrates’ classification encourages one to assume that lawgiving and justice care for the individual soul in the way that gymnastic and medicine care for the individual body, but he does not prove this contention, nor is it an obvious inference from common notions concerning law and justice (or, more specifically, the administration of justice).

In this section, themes from Socrates' conversation with Gorgias resurface, but Polus openly states what Gorgias only hinted at. Polus asserts that having tyrannical power is beneficial, that doing injustice is often beneficial (especially on a tyrannical scale), and that many unjust people are happy. It also becomes clear that these beliefs rest on even more fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of human happiness. Put simply, the core of happiness lies in the secure enjoyment of bodily and external goods such as health, pleasure, wealth, and power. All of these can be acquired and enjoyed without justice. Finally, Socrates makes it explicit that almost everybody agrees with Polus. Thus, common opinion believes that, although justice is a virtue, unjust people, at least when they have sufficient power, are perhaps the happiest of human beings.

After Socrates has delivered his highly unflattering account of rhetoric, Polus comes to rhetoric's defense. Socrates had suggested that rhetors are contemptible. Polus denies this, asking Socrates whether "good rhetors" seem to him "to be esteemed as lowly flatterers in the cities" (466a). The expected answer is, "Of course not." When Socrates further provokes him by saying that he does not think that rhetors count *for anything*, Polus contradicts him by reintroducing the matter of rhetoric's *power* and asking how Socrates could think that they do not count when they wield "the greatest power in the cities" (446b). Socrates denies that they do, claiming that, in fact, "rhetors seem to [him] to have the least power of those in the city," and he claims that this follows from the fact that "having power is something good for him who has it" (466b). In other words, Socrates asserts that, despite Gorgias' claims, the possession of rhetorical skill is of no benefit whatsoever to its possessor and confers on him no power.

Polus emphatically agrees with Socrates that having power is something good for its possessor (466b). As we shall see, this premise is the chief tool by means of which Socrates refutes the claim that rhetors have great power (see 468d-e and 469e-470b). Before analyzing the argument, we should get clear on why Polus would agree to this. By “having great power,” Polus clearly means having the ability to do whatever one pleases despite actual or possible resistance (including the ability to avoid retribution or punishment; see 466b-c, 469c, and 469e-470a). Hence, the successful tyrant stands for Polus as the model of what it means to have great power (see 466b-c468e, 469c). As for why Polus thinks that having this power is always beneficial, he must suppose, first, that this power is good as a means to the acquisition of other good things (as 466b-c suggests), and, second, that these good things are easy to discern. Anybody who had such power could then be assumed to know how to use it to his benefit. If this were not the case, Polus could not so confidently assert that having great power is beneficial, because many who possess it might have harmed themselves through its misuse (see 466e-467a). This way of thinking about power and its benefit surely lies behind the desires which Gorgias’ previous boasts were meant to appeal to. Thus, Polus exhibits more plainly the premise of Gorgias’ boasts on behalf of rhetoric: freedom for oneself and rule over others are supremely good for people and are enviable positions to be in because people in general know what to do with that power if they have it. That the human good is easy to discern is the key premise behind Polus’ assertion that having great power is beneficial.

Once Polus agrees that having great power is beneficial, Socrates asserts that rhetors seem to him to have the *least* power. This statement draws from Polus the incredulous question, “What’s this? Do they not, just like tyrants, kill whomever they wish, and confiscate possessions, and expel from the cities whomever it seems good to them” (466b-c). The comparison of rhetors to tyrants is telling. First, such acts are clearly instances of the “freedom for oneself and rule over others” to which Gorgias had alluded. Second, Polus clearly represents such freedom and rule as personally beneficial but *not* necessarily just (cf. 469a, 470c). Consequently, this statement is the most explicit suggestion so far that doing injustice can be beneficial. The rationale for this belief is not difficult to perceive. The world is full of good things that are the property of others (according to law) and of other people whose interests often conflict with one’s own, and whose interests are protected by law. Those with tyrannical power are able to disregard the law, remove the people who stand in their way, and seize those good things for themselves.

Despite this clear line of reasoning, Socrates cryptically responds to Polus that rhetors and tyrants do not have great power because, although they may do whatever seems good to them, they do almost nothing of what they wish. To Polus, this distinction seems a meaningless quibble (466d-e). Nonetheless, Socrates goes on to prove it at length (466e-470b). As I have said, the key premise by means of which he refutes Polus is that having great power is always beneficial for its possessor. By challenging Polus’ understanding of what is good or beneficial, Socrates uses this premise to confute Polus and to introduce the claims about justice and injustice that he will defend for the rest of

the dialogue. They emerge naturally, as it were, since Polus has held up acts of injustice as examples of great personal benefit.

We need not explore all the details of Socrates' elaboration of the distinction between doing what seems good and doing what one wishes, nor how he uses this to prove that tyrants and rhetors do not have power.¹⁶ The broad outline is as follows. Socrates secures Polus' agreement that those who do whatever seems best to them, but who also happen to be complete fools, will not benefit themselves thereby. Polus would not say that such people exercise "great power" (466e). Consequently, Socrates says, Polus must prove that rhetors have intelligence if he is to prove that their art benefits them and thus confers on them great power.

Socrates also asserts that, in order for Polus to prove this, he must prove that rhetoric is an art (466e-467a). By this he apparently means that, to prove that rhetors have great power, Polus must prove not only that the art gives its possessors the ability to do whatever seems good to them, but also that rhetoric itself imparts to its knowers the knowledge of the good which they will use their skill to pursue.¹⁷ This addition—whether or not required strictly logically—serves to emphasize Polus' assumption (which we have already noted) that pretty much everybody except fools already knows what is beneficial—an assumption which implies, as its premise, that we possess our knowledge of the good as "common sense," *not* as a result of specialized knowledge.¹⁸ If this were

¹⁶ For a helpful evaluation of these arguments from a strictly logical point of view, ignoring their *ad hominem* character, see Irwin 1979 pp. 139-46; for a different account, consult Stauffer 2006, pp. 50-55.

¹⁷ Schleiermacher (1973, p. 175) considers this to be the chief point of Socrates' exchange with Gorgias.

¹⁸ The most obvious evidence that Polus believes this is the fact that he treats rhetors and tyrants as similar and as pursuing the same goals. They differ only in their means: force or persuasion. But tyrants surely don't have their knowledge of what is beneficial imparted to them by rhetoric.

right, of course, Polus would have little problem proving that tyrants and rhetors have great power. We can see, then, that Socrates is already shifting the question away from “power” in its ordinary sense to the question of the human good, and that he does so by uncovering the basis for the envy of power—namely, the belief that what constitutes “the good life” is fairly obvious and is accessible, perhaps especially accessible, through unjust means.

Polus clearly does not understand Socrates’ strange claim that people can do what seems good to them yet not do what they wish. Socrates explains that, when we do something for the sake of something else, we always act for the sake of some benefit that we assume will follow upon our action; for example, we take medicine in order to get healthy, we put out to sea in search of wealth (467c-468b). Otherwise put, we do everything for the sake of the good, where, by “good,” Socrates means our *own* good—even more specifically, our own over-all well-being.¹⁹ Thus, when tyrants or rhetors kill or exile or expropriate, they do it assuming that it will benefit them; they do not do such acts for their own sake (468b-c). Now, by Socrates’ terminology, it is the benefit which is the thing wished for, while it is the actions leading to the benefit that “seem good.” Hence, if tyrants or rhetors perform one of these actions, thinking it beneficial, and it turns out not to be beneficial, they have done what seems good, but not what they wished (468d-e). Socrates therefore concludes “that it is possible for a human being who does in the city what seems good to him not to have great power nor to do what he wishes” (468e).

¹⁹ Cf. Irwin 1979, pp. 140, 142-44

The most remarkable aspect of this passage is its frank egoism.²⁰ Socrates adopts, as it were, Polus' own assumption that we do what we do in pursuit of our own self-interest. This egoistic premise is never retracted in the dialogue, and it should be remembered. It puts the onus on Socrates to prove that, when he argues that doing justice is always beneficial, he means that it is beneficial to the one who performs the just act (not just beneficial in general or for the recipient of the act). The subject of the relation between self-interest and the demands of justice (or the demands of the "common good") will become thematic in the discussion with Callicles.

Polus is obviously unimpressed by this argument. However, instead of taking up Socrates' challenge to prove that rhetors have knowledge (cf. 468c), he tries to turn the tables on Socrates. In an attempt to push past verbal quibbles, Polus argues *ad hominem*, openly alleging that, despite these arguments, Socrates himself would welcome the opportunity to wield tyrannical power and that he envies those who possess it (468e). Since Polus obviously does not infer this from some particular aspect of Socrates' character, he is in fact alleging that *everyone* thinks this way, and that Socrates, despite his clever arguments, is just like anybody else in this regard. He thus openly reveals his belief that tyrants enviably happy, so happy that any reasonable person would jump at the opportunity to assume their rank. Polus has now gone beyond the suggestion that injustice can be profitable to the stronger suggestion that it is better to be unjust than to be just, provided one has sufficient power. Thus we see that behind Polus' agreement that having great power is beneficial lie the beliefs (1) that what is beneficial is not

²⁰ Cf. Stauffer 2006, p. 54

difficult to discern, and (2) that successful injustice (or at least the power to be indifferent to justice, like a tyrant) is more beneficial than being just. Polus has yet to assert *openly* that successful injustice is more beneficial than justice, however.

Socrates now goes on to ask Polus whether, when he referred to enviable acts of killing, exiling, and expropriating, he was talking about instances where these acts are done *justly* or *unjustly*. Polus asks incredulously whether they are “not enviable either way” (469a).²¹ In other words, he finally openly and unambiguously alleges that committing injustice can be personally beneficial. Socrates argues to the contrary that a person who kills justly is not enviable, while the person who kills unjustly is wretched and pitiable. Further (and, contrary to Polus’ understandable expectations), Socrates asserts that the one who is put to death unjustly is both less wretched than the one who is put to death justly and less wretched than the one who kills him unjustly, because doing injustice is a greater evil than suffering it (469a-c). We will shortly return to these claims.

Now exhibiting some doubt, Polus once again asks Socrates whether he would welcome the chance to rule as a tyrant. Socrates responds with a story, the moral of which is this: to be able to do what is good for oneself is not necessarily to exercise great power unless one can avoid any bad consequences that might come from doing so. Anybody can stab or beat anyone else at a moment’s notice, even set fire to the dockyards. But no one would say that the ability to do so constitutes tyrannical power,

²¹ To be precise, then, Polus is *not* claiming that it is always beneficial to unjust, or that it is never beneficial to be just. The implication is that the most profitable way to wield power is simply to consult one’s own interest without respect to whether serving requires justice or injustice.

because, as Polus says, the person who acts this way is sure to be punished (469c-470a). Socrates draws from this admission an apparent non-sequitur. He insists that Polus' admission proves yet again that one has great power and does what one wishes only when one does things beneficial to oneself. I say that this appears to be a non-sequitur because this is not precisely what Polus means. The fact that one is punished for doing something does not prove that what one did was not beneficial; rather, it proves that *not getting away with it* was not beneficial. The very same act, Polus implies, *would* be beneficial if it were not followed by a penalty—a penalty which, on this line of reasoning, is obviously not a necessary consequence of the act itself, but only of being caught in the act or being too weak to ward off the penalty. It is precisely this kind of ability to which Polus is referring when he speaks of “ruling as a tyrant”: to be able to do what you want and get away with it. Hence he will soon defend the claim that “many unjust people are happy” (see 470d).

Having brought out these opinions, Socrates finally confronts them directly. Polus' assumption had been that tyrannical power is beneficial, though he has now admitted that acting as a tyrant is not necessarily beneficial. One can do the things that tyrants do and sometimes harm oneself as a result. The logical question, then, and the one that Socrates asks, is, When is it beneficial to do the things that Polus has mentioned? When is it beneficial to kill or exile or expropriate (470b)? Either out of shame or annoyance, or for some other reason, Polus tells Socrates to answer the question himself. Obliging, Socrates responds that “when someone does those things justly, it is better,

but when unjustly, worse” (470c). No tyrant or anyone else, Socrates implies, has ever benefited himself by acting unjustly.

Polus thinks even a child could refute such a position, and goes on to tell the story of Archelaus (471a-d) to prove that “many human beings who do injustice are happy” (470d). At first, Polus merely mentions Archelaus, assuming that Socrates will immediately admit that Archelaus is both unjust and happy. Socrates, to Polus’ surprise, says that he does not know whether Archelaus is happy, since he has not spent time with him. By this line of reasoning, Polus interjects, Socrates would not admit even that the Great King is happy, and Socrates agrees, since he “do[es] not know how he stands in regard to education and justice.” Education and justice, he affirms, are “the whole of happiness,” because “the noble and good man and woman are happy; the unjust and base wretched.”²² Polus concludes that Socrates must, then, consider Archelaus wretched, to which Socrates agrees, provided that Archelaus is indeed unjust (470e-471a). Polus considers Archelaus’ injustice to be obvious, and tells the story of his rise to power to exhibit it. The illegitimate son of the ruler of Macedon, Archelaus by right should have been a slave since his mother was so. He apparently illegally usurped the rule of Macedon upon his father’s death. In order to consolidate his power, he murdered his uncle, cousin, and younger half-brother, all of whom (Polus asserts) had a greater legal right to the throne.

Polus believes he has answered Socrates’ challenge to prove that Archelaus is unjust. We can see from this that Polus has fundamentally the same conception of justice

²² This statement refers back to the good condition of soul (see 464a).

as Gorgias did: justice consists in obeying the law, not harming one's family, friends, or fellow citizens, not stealing or deceiving or murdering simply to serve one's own advantage. He, like Gorgias, thinks it obvious what justice is and what it demands. On the other hand, in keeping with his implicit assumption that the contents of happiness are obvious, Polus never even attempts to prove that Archelaus is happy. As we have already seen, he assumes that anyone in such a position of absolute rule will be happy. Thus, Polus simply does not rise to the challenge posed by Socrates' assertion that the whole of happiness lies in being educated and just, noble and good. Nonetheless, he has finally openly asserted that injustice can be beneficial and that the most unjust human beings (if successful) are among the happiest.

Socrates agrees with nothing that Polus has said (471d). He affirms nonetheless that "concerning the things you are saying, all Athenians and foreigners, save a few, will assert the same things along with you, if you wish to provide witnesses against me" (472a). This statement is very important, since Socrates here confirms what I have said before: Polus' opinions (and so also those of Gorgias) reflect *common* opinion. Even reputable people would admit that unjust people such as Archelaus can be happy. According to Socrates, however, Polus' "witnesses" be "false witnesses" (472b). In saying what Polus says, they will be lying. Socrates, it seems, has implied that almost everybody both does and does not believe that unjust people can be happy. Since he grants that most people will agree verbally with Polus, the burden of proof is on him to show that they are contradicting themselves when they do so. Regardless of how this is done, we have now seen that Polus gives voice to a common ambivalence towards

justice, which rests on the notion that happiness (or the human good) can be attained and secured by unjust means and, thus, that justice is not necessary for happiness and the heights of happiness may require *in*justice.

Before attempting to prove to Polus that injustice is the greatest evil, he adds a second proposition to be proved. Polus affirms that doers of injustice certainly would not be happy if they were caught and punished for their wrongdoing. The unsuccessful criminal is “most wretched.” The successful criminal, on the other hand, will be happy (472d-e). Against this Socrates asserts that “the one who does injustice and is unjust is altogether wretched, but more wretched if he does not pay the just penalty nor meet with retribution when he does injustice, and less wretched if he pays the just penalty and meets with just judgment from gods and human beings” (472e). Polus considers this claim “absurd” (*atopon*, 473a). He finds it impossible to believe that a man plotting unjustly to attain tyranny, but who is caught, tormented, tortured, mutilated, and executed could be happier than the aspiring tyrant who succeeds in his coup and lives the rest of his life with great power, doing as he pleases and accounted enviable (473c). Socrates calls this description a “bogeyman”: neither would be happier, since both are unjust. Still, the one who is punished would be less wretched. Polus laughs and asserts that no human being would say such a thing, and that any of those watching their conversation could attest to this (473e). Socrates demurs. He is not a politician and does not know how to put things to a vote. He implores Polus to answer for himself (473e-474b). Polus agrees to submit to questioning.

In this section of the dialogue, the claim has finally been made openly not only that committing injustice can be beneficial but that those who are freed of the need to respect justice—those with “great power” like tyrants—are enviably happy. We are also led to believe, through Socrates’ own admission, that most people believe this—even if there is another part of them (so to speak) which doubts it. Common opinion is ambivalent about the value of being just. We have also seen that this ambivalence rests of a conception of happiness which entails that the securing and enjoying of the good things in life does *not* require the virtue of justice but only “great power.”

2.3. Doing and Suffering Injustice (474e-481b)

In the final part of their conversation, Socrates refutes Polus’ claim that successfully committing injustice can be beneficial. He proves, to the contrary, that it is always better to be just than to be unjust, that it is more personally harmful to commit injustice than to suffer it at the hands of another, and that it is, in fact, more personally harmful to commit injustice and escape punishment than to be punished for one’s injustice. He is able to do this by securing Polus’ agreement to the proposition that, however profitable committing injustice might be, it is nonetheless more shameful (*aischōn*). Thus, after having brought out the envy of successful injustice in the previous section, in this section Socrates brings out the *ambivalence* towards it more fully.

Socrates goes on to prove his assertions through his usual method of question and answer. In response to Socrates’ questions, Polus asserts that, while suffering injustice is worse than doing it, doing injustice is more shameful. Therefore, the admirable (or

noble, *kalon*) and good and the shameful and bad are not the same (474c-d).²³ Polus distinguishes, that is, between those things that are praiseworthy and those that are beneficial, as well as between those things that are disgraceful and those that are harmful. On that score, Polus is squarely in agreement with common opinion (see 482c-483a). Socrates proposes to Polus that everything which is called “admirable” (or “noble,” or “beautiful”) is called such with a view either to some pleasure or to some benefit, supporting this claim by a string of examples: bodies, shapes, colors, sounds, music, laws, practices, and sciences (474d-475a). Polus accepts this definition without reservation (475a). Socrates then points out two corollaries of defining the noble in this manner. First, if something is nobler than something else, it must exceed that other thing in pleasure or benefit or both. Second, and consequently, since the shameful is the opposite of the noble, if something is more shameful than something else, it must exceed that thing in pain or harm or both (475a-b). Polus accepts this as well. Socrates then easily proves to Polus that, since doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, it must be either more painful or more harmful; since it is not more painful, it must be more harmful. Therefore, contrary to Polus’ first contention, *doing* injustice is worse than suffering it, and no human being would choose what is worse over what is better (475b-e).

²³ The term *kalon* is impossible to translate in a consistent way, since it has a range of application that no single English word matches (cf. LSJ, “*kalos*,” Irwin 1979, p. 154, and Irwin 1977, pp. 290-91 n. 29). In general, it seems to denote a quality or thing which calls forth approbation or praise or admiration. Hence, “admirable” is often a good translation. Sometimes, however, “admirable” seems too weak, and “noble” captures the meaning better. It is also used in contexts where we would say “beautiful.” Sometimes “fine” may be the best translation, though that word has less force in it than *kalon*.

It is hard to be satisfied with this argument.²⁴ Even if it were cogent, it is a hollow victory on Socrates' part. He gains Polus' verbal assent, but entirely fails to persuade him. Nor should Polus be persuaded, since Socrates has done nothing to address the concerns (and, one might even add, the obvious facts) that lead him to believe that suffering injustice is worse than doing it. Socrates has proven his case merely "by definition." He may have been able to establish that doing injustice is "worse," but such a conclusion carries little force without some idea *how* or *in what way* it is worse. The harm that issues from suffering injustice is obvious. It is not even clear that *any* harm follows on unpunished injustice. Further, even if doing injustice is always harmful, Socrates has not proven that it is harmful *to the doer*. That is assumed, but it does not even follow from the definition of the shameful, which merely requires that a shameful act be harmful to someone.

Socrates' refutation has two other major flaws. First, he seems to argue in a backward fashion. He has defined the noble with reference to pleasure and benefit and then assumes that anything that Polus (following common opinion) calls "noble" *must*, therefore, be pleasant or beneficial or both. Surely, however, it has not been proven that everything that is *called* "noble" necessarily is. The proper procedure, it seems, would be to examine what is called noble to see whether it conforms to the definition.²⁵ Second, Socrates has violated one of his own cardinal rules of conversation. He has discussed whether justice is noble and doing injustice is shameful without first saying what justice

²⁴ Irwin 1979, pp. 154-59 examines this argument with great precision, as does Vlastos 1991, pp. 139-48. For another analysis, see Stauffer 2006, pp. 68-72.

²⁵ This assumes, of course, that the definition is correct. Since this definition was arrived at through induction from things called "noble" or "shameful," we therefore run into circularity. This problem and the validity of Socrates' definition, is never thematically discussed in the dialogue.

and injustice are; yet, when discussing the topic of rhetoric, Socrates had explicitly forbidden Polus from doing just this very thing (see 448e, 462c-d, 463d). By his own criterion, Socrates has said nothing valid yet about justice. But the conversation moves forward nonetheless.

Putting aside for now some of these objections, we ought to consider more thoroughly the thinking that lies behind Polus' initial belief that suffering injustice is worse. Doing so will give us both a greater understanding of why Polus is unpersuaded, as well as a more precise understanding of Callicles' critique of justice, because Callicles starts from many of the same facts and observations that Polus assumes here.

On the surface, it seems much more sensible to say that those who suffer injustice are thereby rendered worse off than those who wronged them. The expropriated and the exiled person is clearly worse off than he was before he suffered these misfortunes (all other things being equal, of course), since he formerly enjoyed good things that he is now deprived of. (After all, Socrates never denies that suffering injustice is harmful—only that it is *less* harmful than committing it.) The doer of injustice, on the other hand, would seem to be better off, since he now enjoys what formerly belonged to his victim. Indeed, one might think that the process of legal punishment often presupposes that *unpunished* wrongdoing is intrinsically *beneficial*. If it were not, there would be less need to deter it. Therefore, acts that are not intrinsically harmful are *rendered* harmful through the machinery of the law. If criminals, in the act of committing crimes, routinely harmed themselves more than their victims, they would, as Socrates said (469a-b), be wretched and pitiable, certainly not an object of anger or indignation or any punishment beyond

restitution. These reflections would seem to support Polus' contention that successful injustice is beneficial. In committing injustice, one seizes something good for oneself, something that the law prevents one from otherwise having. The power to avoid punishment secures that good thing for oneself. So one enjoys the intrinsic benefits of injustice and avoids the extrinsic penalties. Thus, Polus' belief that suffering injustice is more personally harmful than committing it appears to rest on common sense and to be presupposed by the ordinary responses to injustice (anger, indignation, punishment).

Socrates' refutation, as I have said, is unpersuasive. It does, however, suggest the following line of reasoning. Ordinary opinion holds that injustice is generally harmful for the one who suffers it and beneficial for the one who does it. In addition, it considers doing injustice more shameful than suffering it. This state of affairs suggests that doing injustice is considered shameful *because* it harms others. That this is true, and why, will become a theme once Callicles enters the conversation. Here it is merely indicated. Once the problem becomes thematic, Socrates will in turn be forced to explain *why* doing injustice is more harmful (for the doer) than suffering it, which is precisely what is left obscure in his conversation with Polus.

After having proven that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, Socrates moves on to his second claim, that not paying the penalty for one's injustice is worse than paying it—or, that those who commit injustice are better off if they are punished for their crimes rather than if they get away with it (476e-479d).

The first part of his argument (476b-477a) relies on the same premises as his previous argument. He contends that a person who is punished justly is benefited,

because this person suffers a just thing, while every just thing is a noble (*kalon*) thing, and thus either pleasant or beneficial or both. Since being punished is not pleasant, it must, therefore, be beneficial.²⁶ Polus acquiesces, simply granting to Socrates the crucial premise: that all just things are noble insofar as they are just (476b). Here he echoes common opinion. Nor does Polus challenge Socrates' inference that, since just punishment is something good, it must be beneficial for the person who suffers it. It is certainly possible that to suffer just punishment is to suffer something good, but that good thing is not necessarily good *for the sufferer*. Consider, for example, having to pay a fine.

Having proven that being justly punished is beneficial, Socrates moves on to discuss the nature of the benefit. Polus grants him that the benefit conferred by punishment must be some improvement of the soul, presumably since punishment rarely improves one's body or possessions, and that this improvement must be a release from some "badness of soul." Socrates then proves that badness of soul, or vice, is the greatest of evils (477b-e). He proves this through recourse, once again, to the definition of admirable and shameful. He lays out three classes of bad things for human beings: a bad condition with respect to property (poverty); a bad condition with respect to one's body (ugliness, sickness, and so forth); and a bad condition with respect to one's soul.²⁷ Polus, in keeping with common opinion, simply grants that bad condition of soul (baseness [*ponēria*] or vice [*kakia*]) is more shameful than poverty or sickness. Since it is not more

²⁶ It is assumed that this benefit must be for the one punished, though this is hardly the implicit thinking behind the ordinary practice of legal punishment.

²⁷ He treats "baseness" of soul as a unitary condition, although he names several forms of it: lack of learning, cowardice, intemperance, injustice. If baseness of soul has many different forms, his later argument that punishment cures baseness of soul proves even more doubtful than it already is.

painful than they are, it follows by definition that baseness of soul is worse or more harmful than poverty or sickness. Hence, it is the greatest evil a human being can suffer. Once again, the formalism of this argument throws the readers' attention on the (unanswered) question *how* such baseness is extraordinarily harmful. Socrates suggests that this condition is harmful because it implies that one is unjust, ignorant, cowardly, and intemperate (477b, d)—but, again, Polus simply grants to Socrates that these shameful qualities are what constitute true baseness of soul, and Socrates concludes that they are harmful from the fact that they are shameful, so nothing concrete is said. Because of Polus' admissions, Socrates is never forced to define "baseness of soul" and its parts or explain, in particular, how baseness of soul is harmful and thus fits the definition of something shameful. Otherwise put, Socrates is allowed to assume that common opinion is correct about the vices; he merely concludes that all vices (including injustice) are harmful.

Having proven that baseness of soul is the greatest evil, Socrates next argues that just punishment releases one from it (477e-478d). Socrates argues that, in the case of poverty, one remedies the situation by means of the art of moneymaking; in the case of sickness, by going to a doctor. Polus proves unable to name at first the expert or expertise that remedies baseness of soul. Socrates leads him to the answer by suggesting an analogy. We take the sick to doctors so that they can be treated. What expert do we take the unjust to? Judges, of course, so that they will pay a penalty, which is applied in accordance with the "art of justice"—that is, legal adjudication and administration of punishment. Thus, justice (in the form of judicially prescribed punishment) releases one

from baseness of soul (see again Socrates' classification of true and false arts at 464a-466a).

This whole line of argument is highly questionable, since it relies on the premise that judges and punishments stand in the same relation to wrongdoers that doctors and medical treatments stand in relation to patients (478a-b; cf. 464b-c, 465c). Polus implicitly assents to this analogy (478a) even though it seems to run completely counter to common sense both in its supposition that the judicial process is aimed primarily at the well-being of wrongdoer and in its total disregard for the interests of the wronged party in a trial. Socrates, it seems, *appears* to defend the ordinary administration of punishment, but it seems almost impossible that he truly is doing so. At the very least, he would have to defend the premises of his argument just mentioned. It is unclear what exactly Socrates means by "justice" and "punishment."

At any rate, it follows from the foregoing line of reasoning that that person is best off who has no need for punishment in the first place. Just as it is better simply to be healthy than to be sick, undergo treatment, and be returned to health, it is better simply to be just than to be unjust, punished, and made just (477e-478e). It further follows that it is far worse to be unjust and not be punished than to be unjust and receive punishment. The unjust person who avoids punishment is the equivalent of a sick person who refuses treatment, although the unjust person suffers from an even greater ill than his sick counterpart (478e-479c).

Socrates has thus proven his two contentions, that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, and that it is worse to do injustice and avoid punishment than to do injustice

but be punished for it. Socrates brings the discussion to a close by examining what use rhetoric could have, given what he has proven (480a-481b). Since no one has an interest in getting away with injustice, or with helping family or friends do so, rhetoric will not be useful for that purpose. If at all, rhetoric would be useful for the opposite purpose. If one does injustice, rhetoric could be used to denounce oneself and receive proper punishment. If one's friends or members of one's family do injustice, rhetoric could be used to bring them to justice as well. Further, if it is proper to harm anyone at all, rhetoric could be used to harm our enemies by ensuring that they are never brought to court, or, if they are, that they escape conviction and punishment. Because unpunished injustice is the greatest harm that can befall a human being, the greatest way to harm one's enemies would be to use rhetoric to help them do the greatest injustices and never be punished. Polus grants that such things may follow from the previous arguments, but he seems entirely unpersuaded by these outrageous claims. Socrates having said these things, Callicles enters the discussion and we never hear from Polus again.

3. Conclusion

The exchange with Polus contributes to our investigation because it renders explicit a small number of important problems regarding the nature and benefit of justice. It reveals that the principal appeal of rhetoric lies in its promise to give its practitioners the power to do what they please, or at least to give them greater power to do so, by giving them the power, through persuasion, to bend the wills of others to their own. We have further seen that the appeal of this vision of freedom for oneself and rule over others

presumes that it is not difficult to figure out what is good for oneself. The challenge is to attain it, and that means, in particular, to remove the obstacles placed in front of it by other human beings. Polus has further revealed (much more explicitly than Gorgias) that this idea of power and happiness is ambivalent towards justice. It does not simply reject justice, but it does hold, on the basis of common-sense premises, that successful injustice can be very beneficial, and, thus, that happiness does not, in every instance, rely on one's justice. Indeed, the belief that great power is greatly beneficial, as Polus conceives it, rests on the assumption that justice places a limit on one's pursuit of happiness. Hence the "great power" wielded by rhetors and tyrants is the power to benefit oneself *despite* justice, and this implies that the peaks of happiness can be reached only by those capable of being unjust and getting away with it. In short, ordinary opinions about what happiness is and how it can be acquired imply that arbitrary power (successfully exercised) is more personally beneficial than the virtue of justice.

Polus' position collapses because he cannot give a consistent account of the relationship between his conception of happiness (outlined above) and his conception of what is admirable or shameful (or, alternatively, the conception of the admirable to which he defers). Since, however, the pursuit of his conception of happiness requires the use of shameful means, he cannot give a coherent account of the happiness he envies or the life he admires. Socrates' refutations of Polus, therefore, do not so much disprove his beliefs as show that Polus fails to defend them adequately. As we have seen, Polus adheres to the common opinion that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. However, his apparent belief that everything shameful must somehow be bad leads him

into the self-contradictory position of maintaining that committing injustice is both good (because profitable) and bad (because shameful). In this self-contradictory state, he reproduces the confusion inherent in the common opinions which he expresses. He proves unable (or perhaps unwilling) to explain how something can be both profitable and shameful, yet he is unwilling to break with common opinion over what should or should not be considered shameful.

As I have said, these difficulties may prove to be a product of nothing more than faulty arguing and unwillingness to say shameful things.²⁸ We have noticed, in fact, a number of defects in Socrates' own argumentation. In violation of his own principle, he talks of justice as something noble and injustice as something shameful without ever defining what justice and injustice are. He also (apparently or for the sake of argument) assumes that that common opinion is correct in what it has labeled noble and shameful. Further, he has without proof assumed that noble or base deeds are deemed noble or base on account of the benefit or harm that they cause for their doer (rather than the one who suffers the deed)—even though, in matters of justice and injustice, he departs from common opinion on this score. Behind all of this, of course, is the assertion that having a soul in good condition is of paramount importance for happiness; however, Socrates has said nothing definite about what this good condition consists of. He has upset Polus' (and common opinion's) assumption that the contents of happiness are obvious, but he has not proven anything as to the *true* contents of happiness.

²⁸ Which Polus seems to think explains the refutation of Gorgias; see 461b-c.

Hence, we are left with a number of questions that must be answered before we can conclude with confidence that Polus is indeed wrong and Socrates right. If, as I have suggested, committing injustice is considered shameful because it is harmful to others, *should* it be considered shameful for that reason? Why? And, if this is true, how can Socrates nonetheless maintain that doers of injustice are harmed more than their victims? What is the character of the harm done to their souls, and why is it the greatest evil? What, for that matter, is justice? And what is the good condition of soul, of which it is part? Further, what is the human good, of which good condition of soul is a part? Finally, one should ask whether common opinion is correct in what it labels noble or shameful, since Socrates' whole argument seemed to rest on the premise that it was.

On a related note, it is worth mentioning that Socrates has hardly done more than to give the *appearance* of defending the decent part of common opinion which holds that one ought never to do injustice. He has bolstered this opinion by asserting, contrary to what would seem to be obvious, that doing injustice is always more harmful to the doer than to the sufferer. Nonetheless, this apparent defense of justice could also be seen as a potential or implicit critique of what ordinarily passes for justice. As I have said, Socrates' arguments rest on the premise that common opinion is correct in what it labels noble or shameful. If it is not, then none of Socrates' conclusions follows. This means, for example, that what ordinarily passes for virtue could be vice (and vice versa), that what the law considers unjust may not be so, that the punishments it metes out for these injustices are harmful rather than beneficial and do not promote virtue, and, in general,

that “justice” in the ordinary sense of the term (law-abidingness, refraining from harming others) may not constitute a good condition of soul at all.

Callicles take up some of these difficulties. As we shall see, he will attempt to refute Socrates by explaining (as Socrates did not) what justice is and where it comes from. He will attempt to prove thereby that it is falsely considered noble and admirable. He will directly deny the crucial premise of Socrates’ whole line of reasoning: that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. More generally, he will attempt to straighten out the confusions (latent in common opinion) which led Gorgias and Polus into self-contradiction.

Chapter Two

The Critique of Justice in the *Gorgias* (2):

Callicles (481b-527e)

As we have seen, by the time Callicles enters the conversation, Socrates has guided it such that the question of the value of rhetoric now hangs on the answer to a prior question: can injustice ever be profitable? Gorgias had hinted at a positive answer when advertising the great power and benefit of the art of rhetoric, only to withdraw the suggestion. Polus had asserted outright that many unjust human beings are happy, giving as an example a conspicuous tyrant. He did so in the midst of praising rhetoric for its tyrannical power, suggesting more openly than Gorgias that part of the profit of the rhetorical skill lies in its power to accomplish unjust but beneficial designs. Socrates was able to prove against Polus that injustice can never be beneficial. The lynchpin of his argument was clearly Polus' agreement that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it (474c), since this concession allowed Socrates to deduce the superior harmfulness of doing injustice, as well as the proposition that baseness of soul (*hē tēs psuchēs ponēria*, 477c) is the greatest evil a human being can suffer (see 475b-c, 477c-e). Socrates' arguments were, however, unsatisfactory in at least two ways. First, they presuppose that doing injustice truly is more shameful than suffering it. Second, they establish that "baseness of soul" is the greatest evil a person can suffer without saying anything concrete about what baseness of soul is and what constitutes its harmfulness.

Callicles will take up Socrates' arguments at their most vulnerable point. He will deny that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it by saying that, in effect, there is nothing wrong with doing injustice. He will assert that what most people call "doing injustice" is often, in fact, the opposite. He thus ends up being both a critic of justice as well as a defender of it; that is, a critic of justice as most people conceive of it, and a defender of justice as (he thinks) it is in truth. By doing so, he attempts to combine what Polus had separated: the noble and the beneficial. In this chapter, I will argue that Callicles fails to accomplish this. His attempt to reconcile nobility and benefit through his conception of natural justice fails because he is unable to think through his own presuppositions about the nature of virtue and happiness. More fundamentally, Callicles has not made it clear to himself whether virtue is extrinsically or intrinsically related to human happiness, whether it is a mere means to happiness or an integral part of it. Socrates' cross-examination reveals Callicles' confusion. I will also argue, however, that his core criticism of ordinary justice is not refuted in the conversation, and, in fact, that Socrates' refutation of him makes certain concessions to his criticisms. In other words, Socrates does not defend the "justice" that Callicles had criticized.

The exchange between Socrates and Callicles can be divided into two large parts. The first part (482c-495c) consists of an elaboration and examination of Callicles' understanding of justice. The second part (495c-522e) consists of Socrates' refutation of Callicles' position, along with his drawing out of the consequences of that refutation.

The dialogue ends with a myth about the afterlife (523a-526d), and a closing exhortation to Callicles to practice justice (526d-527e).

Before turning to the conversation, I would like to lay out ahead of time the most salient pieces of what we know about Callicles the man.²⁹ To begin with, he is a young and politically ambitious Athenian aristocrat. He comes from good stock (512d) and associates with good stock (481d), and (if Socrates is to be trusted) he is proud of his lineage (again, 512d). He has received the standard education of a well-born Athenian (487b; cf. *Protagoras* 325c-326e), and, through Gorgias or others or both, he has been exposed to the sophistic doctrines of his day (447b, 482e-483e). In his social and educational background, then, he differs little from Glaucon or Adeimantus. He has already performed military service (498a) and he is just at the beginning of his political career (515d). Despite his ambition, his career so far, at least as Socrates depicts it, is undistinguished. His participation in the assembly consists of little besides telling the people what it wants to hear, even if it means that he must contradict himself (481d-e). Finally, although he in no way presents himself as a friend to the common people, his oligarchic sympathies apparently do not go so far as to make him an admirer of Sparta (see 515e), and all evidence suggests that Callicles whole-heartedly approves of Athens' imperial politics (see, for example, 517a-b). In sum, he is a young aristocrat who aspires

²⁹ There is no way of knowing whether Callicles actually existed, since the only evidence is the *Gorgias* itself. I tend to agree with Dodds (1959, p. 12) that Callicles must have existed, but Romilly (1992, p. 156) is right to point out that, for the purpose of interpreting the dialogue, it does not matter. For more about what can be deduced about Callicles from the biographical facts provided in the dialogue, cf. Dodds 1959, pp. 12-15 and Irwin 1979, p. 110.

to stand at the head of an imperial democracy, but who, in practice, follows rather than leads the crowd.

From these details alone we can draw two principles for interpreting Callicles' arguments in the *Gorgias*. First, he is neither a sophist nor an intellectual.³⁰ He is, rather, a practical man with a general education. Thus, although he has been exposed to sophistic doctrines, it would not be wise to expect some kind of strict theoretical consistency from his views (see 487c-d on not being too precise). Further, Callicles will therefore present the problem of justice as it appears from the perspective a politically ambitious, aristocratic man of action, a man who considers himself (potentially) a leader of the community. Second, we should not forget Socrates' depiction of Callicles in the assembly, shifting around and contradicting himself in order to say what the crowd approves of. This picture casts an ironic shadow over Callicles' "outspokenness" with Socrates and the strident elitism of his views.

1. Callicles' Entrance and Socrates' Response (481b-482c)

Callicles enters the conversation with an aside to Chaerephon, asking him whether Socrates is being serious or joking regarding what he had just said to Polus. Being invited by Chaerephon to ask Socrates himself, Callicles turns to Socrates and asks him the same question, adding that, if Socrates is serious and also correct, then most people do the opposite of what they should (481b-c). This last statement, no doubt, refers to Socrates' claim that, if rhetoric is useful, it must be for condemning ourselves and those

³⁰ As Romilly (1992, p. 42) rightly notes.

we care for when we or they have been unjust, and for making sure that our enemies get off scot-free. As we shall see, although Callicles appears here to be willing to consider the possibility that Socrates is right, and to be aware of the gravity of the question,³¹ he will shortly reveal both hostility towards Socrates (cf. 482c-e) and an almost complete unwillingness to entertain the possibility that Socrates is speaking the truth.³² Further, however politely or sincerely Callicles initiates his conversation with Socrates, Socrates responds to him in a manner that appears calculated to strip away any superficial politeness. In fact, he insults Callicles and provokes him.

The ostensible purpose of Socrates' response to Callicles (481c-482c) is to establish common ground between Callicles and himself so that Callicles can understand how he could say such outrageous things in full seriousness. He tells Callicles that it can be very difficult for people to communicate with one another if they do not have some experiences in common. In the present case, however, he and Callicles *do* have a common experience which, it is implied, will help Callicles understand why Socrates says what he is saying. The two of them are both "lovers" (*erōnte*), and both of two beloveds (*paidika*).³³ Socrates is in love with philosophy and Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, and Callicles is in love with the Athenian people and Demos, the son of Pyrilampes

³¹ Irwin (1979, p. 169) and Dodds (1959, p. 260) both comment of the apparent seriousness of Callicles here.

³² It is difficult to prove this by citing any one passage, but I think it follows both from his understanding of Socrates' trickery, which suggests that he does not think even Socrates himself believes his own words, as well as from his already firm convictions about the nature of justice and political life. Even when Socrates is able temporarily to get through to him (at 513c), Callicles maintains that he is unconvinced.

³³ Nichols (1998a) translates the word as "boyfriend."

(481c-d).³⁴ And Socrates has observed that, in his relations with the people and with Demos, Callicles is utterly unable to contradict what his beloveds say, to the extent that he will turn around and contradict himself if one of his beloveds disagrees with him. It is here that we get the unflattering portrait of Callicles' activity in the assembly: "In the assembly," Socrates says, "if, as you are saying something, the Athenian people denies that it is so, you turn around and say what it wishes; and also in regard to this beautiful youth, the son of Pyrilampes, you have suffered other things of this sort. For you are not able to oppose either the proposals or the speeches of your boyfriends" (481e). Thus, if someone were surprised to see him contradicting himself, Callicles could truthfully explain his behavior by blaming it on his love. If one wishes to make Callicles speak otherwise, one must convince his beloveds to do so, for he will always say whatever his beloveds say (481e-482a).

Before moving on to the larger point that Socrates wishes to make, it must be reiterated that Socrates has just insulted Callicles.³⁵ He has, in effect, said that Callicles has no integrity in his relations either with the multitude or with his beloved. In light of what Socrates has said earlier (cf. 464c-465a), Socrates has called Callicles a flatterer. He attends neither to the truth nor to what he believes beneficial. In each instance his concern is to ingratiate himself with his beloveds by agreeing with them. And this

³⁴ Socrates is punning here: Callicles is in love with the *demos* of Athens and that of Pyrilampes. Demos was apparently known both for his good looks and his slow wits. He was also Plato's stepbrother. See Dodds 1959, p. 261 for what is known about him. On being a "lover of the people," cf. the *First Alcibiades* 131e-132a. Further on, I will explore what Socrates means in calling Callicles a "lover of the people." Newell (2000, p. 12) has this to say: "Callicles plans to pursue the Athenian *dēmos* just as he pursues the boy Demos, in the hope that his beloved will gratify him if he can provide sufficient benefits." I think the subsequent conversation will bear this out.

³⁵ Dodds (1959, p. 260) is correct to say that Socrates is being playful here, but he is wrong to suggest that this somehow blunts the insulting character of what Socrates has said. To deliver an insult through mockery is not to lessen its insulting character.

means, it seems, that he is willing to say *anything* to do so, whether or not he believes it true. Perhaps more insulting from Callicles' perspective is the implication that Callicles does not lead the many but merely follows them.³⁶ The more serious purpose of this playful speech seems to be to show not so much what Socrates and Callicles have in common but rather what separates them: namely, devotion to incompatible objects. An important statement later in the dialogue (513c) confirms this.

After this unflattering picture, Socrates makes his ostensible point. The experience that he and Callicles have is common in not merely being two lovers but, more specifically, being unable to contradict their beloveds. More specifically still, Socrates says that he is unable to contradict his beloved philosophy, and that philosophy always says the things about justice which Callicles has just now heard Socrates saying (482a-b).³⁷ Therefore, if Callicles wishes Socrates to speak otherwise, he must refute philosophy's contention that "doing injustice and not paying the just penalty when one does injustice are...the utmost of all evils" (482b). Given that Socrates already knows that Callicles is not an admirer of philosophy (cf. 487c-d), it seems reasonable to treat his introduction of philosophy here as another provocation. He has in effect identified his "strange" position with that of philosophy itself, thereby almost demanding that Callicles criticize philosophy in his response.³⁸

³⁶ As for the insulting character of what Socrates has said regarding Callicles' relations with his boyfriend Demos, it suffices to ask oneself what is implied in saying to someone, "You only say or do what your boyfriend/girlfriend tells you." With all due allowance for cultural differences, I cannot imagine that such a statement was any more flattering in ancient Greece than it is today.

³⁷ Stauffer (2006, p. 84) is correct to note that Socrates adds another jab in this statement, since he contrasts philosophy with Alcibiades, who always says different things (482a), implying that Socrates *can* contradict one of his boyfriends, while Callicles is unable to contradict even the air-headed Demos.

³⁸ Stauffer (2006, pp. 84-85) calls attention to this as well.

Socrates adds one final provocation. Not only must Callicles refute philosophy in order to change Socrates' mind, if he *fails* to refute philosophy, Socrates says he will be in contradiction *with himself* (482b). It is unclear what this statement means beyond the elementary point that someone who rejects a position without being able to refute it does not know that the rejected position is false, even though he acts as though he does.³⁹ In the context, however, it sets up something of a boast on Socrates' part: namely, that he is in a position superior to that of Callicles since, although he is "out of tune" with public opinion, he is consistent with himself, while Callicles, in his efforts to "harmonize" with public opinion, has rendered himself out of tune with himself (482b-c). In other words, Socrates and his philosophy are much better off than Callicles and his people.

We see, then, that by the time Callicles delivers his long speech (482c-486d), he has been provoked by Socrates in at least five ways: he has been called a lover and flatterer of the people; he has been accused of contradicting himself in order to ingratiate himself with the assembly; he has been accused of saying whatever his dim-witted boyfriend wants him to; further, Socrates has covertly invoked Callicles' hostility towards philosophy; and Socrates has implied that Callicles is in contradiction with himself and worse off than Socrates. It should come as no surprise, then, that when Callicles reenters whatever politeness he might have displayed previously has disappeared.

2. Callicles' Opening Speech (482a-486d)

³⁹ Buzzetti 2005 puts greater weight on this claim than does my own interpretation.

The long speech which Callicles delivers in response to this provocation can be divided into roughly three parts. In the first part (482c-483a), Callicles exposes what he takes to be Socrates' trickery. He says that Socrates makes secret use of the opposition between nature (*phusis*) and convention (*nomos*) in order to trick people into contradicting themselves by manipulating their sense of shame. This, Callicles asserts, is how Socrates was able to refute Gorgias and Polus. In the second part (483a-484c), Callicles uses the distinction between nature and convention to explain both why Polus would claim that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it and why he is wrong and speaking merely according to convention. By convention, the just consists in equality (*to ison*), and injustice in seeking to have more at another's expense (*to pleonechein* or *pleonexia*); by nature, however, the just consists in the stronger having more than the weaker. Natural justice commands what conventional justice forbids.⁴⁰ Here, then, Callicles delivers his refutation of Socrates' previous claims. In the third and last part of his speech (484c-486d), Callicles does two things. First, he delivers an impassioned criticism of Socrates' way of life, claiming that it is both harmful and shameful because, on account of the lack of practical experience that necessarily results from spending all of one's time philosophizing, too much philosophy places one in the condition of being unable to protect from harm either oneself or those one cares for. As a consequence, Callicles exhorts Socrates to give up philosophy and go into politics, where he can do more good for himself and others.⁴¹ I will take up each of these parts in turn.

⁴⁰ In this chapter, the phrase "conventional justice" will always be used to refer to what Callicles calls "the just by law" or "the just by convention."

⁴¹ This exhortation should be compared with that of Crito; cf. *Crito* 45c-46a.

2.1. Exposing Socrates (482c-483a)

In comparison with his earlier behavior (compare 482c-e with 447b and 458d), Callicles is now obviously angry at Socrates.⁴² He begins his long speech by saying that Socrates “acts like a youth in arguments” and accusing him of being a “popular speaker” (482c). That is, he accuses Socrates of an immaturely boastful disputatiousness more proper to a youth, and he returns tit-for-tat by charging that it is *Socrates* who is the true flatterer of the people and their prejudices. Nor are these his only accusations of Socrates. He goes on shortly to say that Socrates is a deceitful lover of victory who merely pretends to be interested in the truth. According to Callicles, Socrates uses trickery to “work evil in the arguments” (483a), leading his interlocutors into self-contradiction (the result he is “fond of,” 482d) by secretly and unfairly manipulating their sense of shame. In this way, Socrates dishonestly reaps the fruits of superiority in argument. Callicles discusses the nature of Socrates’ trickery in some detail. It is helpful to follow this part of his speech (482c-483a), since it reveals Callicles’ understanding of the previous course of the conversation, while beginning to reveal his understanding of Socrates and of nature and convention, on which theme the next part of his speech elaborates.

After accusing Socrates of acting immaturely and engaging in claptrap, Callicles gives a brief account of how Socrates has been able to better Gorgias and Polus in

⁴² This anger and indignation might, in fact, explain why he immediately goes “on the offensive.” He neither disputes nor defends the behavior attributed to him by Socrates. Instead, he turns the tables, calling Socrates’ character into question.

argument (482c-e). Gorgias and Polus have both “suffered the same experience” (482c), having been led into self-contradiction by their unwillingness to say something shameful or disreputable. Gorgias had been ashamed to deny that he would teach the just things to any student of his who did not know them, and he had been ashamed to do so because he knows that it is “the custom of human beings” to get angry at (or “be indignant towards,” *anagkasthēnai*) anyone who would deny such a thing (482d; cf. *Protagoras* 323a-c). Instead of braving this, saying what he really thought (as Callicles implies), Gorgias took the respectable route—and landed in self-contradiction. Such, Callicles say, was Socrates’ intent all along (482d). The same account generally holds for what happened to Polus, who was unwilling to brave the shame of denying that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it (482d-e). In both cases Callicles implies that Gorgias and Polus did not truly believe their concessions. Having said this much, Callicles then says that these two exchanges are merely instances of Socrates’ characteristic way of arguing. Claiming to pursue only truth (482c), but really bent on victory (482d), Socrates positions himself as a defender of false but respectable pieties (482c, e). He then maneuvers his interlocutor into a position where the latter must either maintain consistency at the cost of saying something shameful, or say something respectable at the cost of self-contradiction.

This maneuver works, Callicles says, because “in most cases” nature and convention are opposed to one another (482e). Socrates knows this and secretly uses it to his advantage.⁴³ For example, Polus had spoken of the shameful according convention

⁴³ If Socrates knows the difference between nature and convention, and cares more about winning arguments than about the truth, it seems improbable that Callicles could have thought at first that Socrates was “serious” in his dispute with Polus. Still, Callicles might have been somewhat less suspicious of Socrates until the latter insulted him.

(or law) when he said that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. Socrates, however, then questioned him in accordance with what is shameful by nature.⁴⁴ But, since nature and convention are opposed to one another, Polus was led into self-contradiction. Since what is noble by nature and what is noble by convention are opposed, “if...someone feels ashamed and doesn’t dare say what he thinks, he is compelled to say contradictory things” (482e-483a).⁴⁵ Thus, Gorgias and Polus have suffered the same fate because Socrates has played the same trick on them both. Socrates has put them into a position where they must choose between two bad options: either contradict the publicly respectable opinions, thereby bringing shame and anger upon themselves, or maintain respectability, but at the cost of contradicting themselves. They both choose to maintain respectability.

In exposing Socrates’ trickery, Callicles thus seems to be taking up the side of justice, or at least the side of honesty. And he presents himself as someone who is willing to say outspokenly the shameful, unpopular truth. From his perspective, then, he also displays a bravery that Gorgias and Polus were unwilling to—or he will when he goes on to explain how things really stand with respect to the noble and shameful. Nonetheless, just as his own indignation was mixed with his desire to expose Socrates’

⁴⁴ That is, Socrates had offered Polus a definition of the admirable and shameful as these stand in nature. Callicles never rejects Socrates’ definition of the admirable and the shameful.

⁴⁵ Callicles’ description is not quite accurate. Polus said more than enough to offend common opinion, since he said the things that Gorgias shied away from saying; namely, that the rhetorical skill confers a beneficial, tyrannical power on its possessor. Still, his description is accurate enough. Socrates has been able to position himself as the defender of conventional justice, and he has dared Polus to say that doing injustice is not only beneficial (which many people might grant) but even admirable. Polus declines to go that far.

unfairness, his own pride will be intermixed with his desire to speak the truth. He does not want to be refuted by Socrates.

2.2. The Account of Justice (483a-484c)

Callicles next takes up Socrates' challenge to disprove the claim that doing injustice and not being punished is the greatest evil a human being can suffer. He does so by explaining the difference and opposition between nature (*phusis*) and convention (*nomos*).⁴⁶ This part of his opening speech can be divided into roughly two sections (with 483a-b as a short prelude). In the first (483a-c), Callicles explains the origin in convention of the opinion that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. In the process of proving this he shows that this opinion is in fact premised on the belief that doing injustice is *beneficial* and thereby shows that this opinion cannot support the conclusions that Socrates deduced from it. Having accounted for conventional justice, Callicles then goes on to give an account of its antithesis, natural justice (483c-484c).

Callicles begins his rejoinder by removing the foundation of Socrates' previous arguments. Socrates based his claim that doing injustice is (in some unspecified way) the greatest of evils on Polus' admission that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. Callicles refuses to make this admission. Taking it as obvious that suffering injustice is more harmful than doing it, he argues that it is, therefore, *more shameful* as well, since, "by nature, everything is more shameful that is also worse." It is only "by convention

⁴⁶ The term *nomos* refers to at least two things: the laws (*nomoi*) and customs of a given community, and the related standards for evaluating human beings and human actions. In other words, *nomos* refers to the realm of public norms and values, whether these are instantiated in written laws or merely in the observed rules of behavior and traditional opinions. (For how these norms are instilled, see, again, *Protagoras* 325c-326e.) I will translate *nomos* as "convention" or "law" as seems appropriate in the context.

[that] doing injustice is more shameful” (483a).⁴⁷ He does not say here *why* the bad is shameful by nature, beyond his implicit endorsement of Socrates’ prior definitions of the noble and shameful (since he indicated that Socrates was, at that time, speaking in accordance with nature). He does, however, illustrate what he has in mind. The “misfortune” of suffering injustice, he says, is not proper to a “real man” (*andros*, 483b), but only to some slavish human being (*andrapodou*). It is proper for a slave to be harmed and insulted, to be “trampled in the mud” and unable to defend “himself or anyone else he cares for” (483a-b).⁴⁸ Such a person, however, is better off dead than alive, being, as he is, utterly at the mercy of even the basest of human beings. A “real man,” on the other hand, would be able to defend himself and his own and, thus, would never suffer such a fate. Suffering injustice is shameful, it seems, because it proves that the sufferer lacks the virtue(s) of a “real man.”

Callicles’ argument here would seem to be the following: everything that is worse is more shameful; but suffering injustice is worse than doing it; therefore, suffering injustice is more shameful than doing it. Consequently, Polus was wrong to admit that doing injustice is more shameful, and, therefore, Socrates cannot deduce the harmfulness of doing injustice from its shamefulness (since, to repeat, it is not shameful). This argument effectively upends the one offered by Socrates, with the implication that, if

⁴⁷ The principle that everything that is worse is more shameful is compatible with Socrates’ definition of the shameful as that which is either painful or harmful or both, but it is not necessarily implied by it, since the latter definition allows for harmful things to exist that are, nonetheless, not shameful. Callicles’ statement is in much more immediate agreement with Socrates’ earlier assertion to Polus that “I call bad things shameful” (463d).

⁴⁸ This passage supports Buzzetti’s (2005, pp. 31-32) claim that Callicles cannot be considered a mere egoist, at least not consistently so; cf. 485e-486a, 486b, 492c.

Socrates wishes to continue to defend his theses, he will have to do so on the basis of different premises.

Given that Socrates and Callicles agree that the bad things are shameful (compare 483a with 463d)—or, more cautiously, that everything shameful is bad in some way—the crucial premise of Callicles’ argument is that suffering injustice is worse than doing it. He flatly denies the conclusion of Socrates’ previous line of reasoning, and he seems to have good reason for doing so. As we saw in the discussion with Polus, this is the “common-sense” belief, and the one that seems to lie behind the practice of punishment. Further, in contrast to the obvious harm that results from suffering injustice—loss of property, physical injury, dishonor, death—the harm that results from doing injustice is not at all obvious, at least when the injustice is not punished.⁴⁹ Hence Polus and almost everyone else (according to Socrates, see 471e-472a) can believe that many doers of injustice are happy and that tyrants can be enviably happy. Socrates had concluded that “harm” for the doer results from doing injustice, but did not say anything concrete about what this harm might be. Callicles, accordingly, pays it no heed. He seems, then, to agree with Polus and common sense regarding what harm consists of. Finally, we should remember that Socrates’ counter-argument to Polus had rested on the assumption that what common opinion labels “noble” or “shameful” truly is so. Callicles, it would seem, proceeds in a more correct manner. If everything that is noble is either good or pleasant or both (and the opposite for the shameful), it would seem to make more sense to

⁴⁹ It should be kept in mind that, although Callicles will go on to “redefine” justice, he always uses the verb *adikeisthai* in its conventional or ordinary sense: *to adikeisthai* always refers to suffering harm or *pleonexia* at the hands of another.

determine the nobility (or shame) of something by seeing whether it has either of those two qualities, rather than taking something commonly called either noble and shameful and assuming that, therefore, it must have one or both of them. Callicles, then, seems to be insisting that one must first know what is beneficial or harmful before one can know what is noble or shameful.⁵⁰ At any rate, both Socrates and Callicles argue in a manner that tends to identify the good and the noble, though it remains unclear what in particular these terms mean and how they might differ from one another even while referring to the same objects.

Callicles may have good grounds for asserting that suffering injustice is more harmful than doing it, but his further claim—that by nature everything that is worse is more shameful—remains an assertion without proof. It is not obvious that it is always shameful or disgraceful to suffer harm (as Callicles himself implicitly admits later; see 511b). If we take his description of the shameful state of slave as a clue to understanding what he means, then it would seem that Callicles is speaking of the noble and the shameful in terms of virtue and vice, rather than in terms of benefit or harm. More specifically, the harm that the slavish person suffers is taken to be the result of his lack of “manly” virtue, while manly virtue is taken (it seems) to be sufficient for defending oneself and one’s own against the violence of others.⁵¹ What is harmful about the slavish state is (so to speak) the harm suffered, while what is shameful about it is that suffering this harm indicates a lack of virtue; but virtue is noble and vice is shameful; therefore

⁵⁰ Stauffer (2006, p. 86) has rightly indicated that, starting here and throughout this speech, Callicles seems to offer the good as the standard for the noble, but that, as we shall see, he inconsistently maintains this.

⁵¹ Consult, in this regard the advice given by Crito to Socrates shortly before the latter’s execution (cf. *Crito* 45d-46a).

suffering injustice is shameful. This seems to be Callicles' true train of thought. We immediately notice that he and Socrates share the premise that virtue (however each understands it) is both noble and beneficial for its possessor. Hence they identify the noble with the good. We must wait to see how Callicles understands this connection between the noble and the good, since it (or its ground) is not entirely clear yet,⁵² and he obviously has something different in mind from what Socrates has said.

As we have already seen, Callicles attributes to convention or law (*nomos*) the belief that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, despite the fact that suffering it is worse. The next part of his speech (483b-c, along with 483e-484a) explains the origin of this opinion. According to Callicles, the law proclaims that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it not because doing injustice is harmful for the wrongdoer but because it is harmful for the one wronged. (We had seen this above in the conversation with Polus.) Law and praise and blame are used to deter people from doing injustice. More specifically, law and praise and blame are used by the weak to deter the strong from doing injustice to them. Accordingly, Callicles asserts that this deterrence is in the interests not of society as a whole but only of the weak majority. As he puts it, "those who set down the laws (*nomoi*) are the weak human beings and the many," and "[i]t is therefore in reference to themselves and their own advantage that they set down laws and praise their praises and blames their blames" (483b).⁵³ The laws and the praise

⁵² Since, as I have just pointed out, Callicles does in fact think that it possible for noble and good men to suffer harm at the hands of their inferiors (see 511b). He must account for how this can happen without destroying his identification of virtue (the noble) with unfailing profit (the good).

⁵³ As a general statement regarding the purpose of law, this is clearly overstated. It seems most appropriate to democracy; cf. Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 1.1-12. In general, it abstracts from the

and blame of the many are a means of self-defense against the few, “the more forceful human beings and those with the power to have more” (483c). The many accordingly blame (and punish, although Callicles does not emphasize that fact) those who attempt to have more than them. Thus, according to the law of the many, “taking more (*pleonektein*) is shameful and unjust, and...doing injustice is this—seeking to have more (*to pleon zētein echein*) than the others” (483c).

According to *nomos*, the noble and the just consists not in taking more but in “having an equal share” (*to ison*; 484a). This phrase does not denote some extreme form of social and material egalitarianism. Rather, Callicles means by *to ison* what Glaucon means by it in his speech in the *Republic* (358e-359c): namely, neither doing nor suffering injustice. Here, “injustice” does not mean “an action counter to the law.” (It could not, since it is the very origin of law that is being explained.) Rather, “injustice” refers to those obvious forms of harm which the law, when it comes about, concerns itself with preventing: injury, murder, plunder, and so forth. These latter acts fall under the notion of “seeking to have more” (*to pleon zētein echein*), since they refer to attempts to get more for oneself by harming another. This is what the law is meant to put an end to.⁵⁴ Since doing injustice generally involves an attempt to “have more” (or to “get the better,” or, in general, to benefit oneself at the expense of another), it seems reasonable to denote the just by the term for equality. The just puts in place a basic framework of

differences between different political orders. It is, however, in fundamental agreement with the account of justice delivered in the myth of Protagoras (see *Protagoras* 322a-323a).

⁵⁴ It is true, of course, that, once law is in place, what counts as an injury or wrong is, generally, whatever the law declares them to be. This is one reason why the just (*to dikaion*) often appears at first sight to be identical with the lawful (*to nomimon*), and, hence, why the general word for doing injury is “doing injustice” (*to adikein*).

reciprocal, symmetrical relationships—which is no doubt one reason why it is possible to translate “*to ison*” as “fairness.”

Callicles asserts that the many “are quite contented...if they themselves have an equal share, since they are lowlier (*phauloteroi*)” (483c). The many do not believe that “having an equal share” is beneficial and that “having more” is harmful. As I have noted many times, they think precisely the opposite. Nonetheless, because they are “lowlier,” they are unable to “have more,” however much they might want to. Hence, they settle for equality as the next best arrangement. In one sense, for the many to have an equal share *is* for them to have more: they have more than they would otherwise have if they had to fight it out with the strong. Callicles is thus arguing that the just, as determined by law, consists in a basic kind of agreement to avoid doing and suffering harm, and that this agreement is made and enforced with a view to the advantage of the weaker members of society (cf. 492c). If it were not for law or convention, then, the weaker would be in precisely that slavish state that Callicles described above (483a-b). That is their natural state. They created *nomos* in order to escape from it.

Here, then, is Callicles’ explanation of the nature and origin of conventional justice and, hence, of the origin of the opinion that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it. The supposedly impartial (or “equal”—*ison*) law, the law that claims to serve the common good, is in fact the self-interested product of the weaker members of society, fraudulently or violently imposed on the stronger.

Callicles’ account of conventional justice is a powerful rejoinder to Socrates’ argument. He has shown in detail that the premise of conventional justice is precisely

that doing injustice is beneficial (if one gets away with it) and that suffering injustice is harmful and worse than doing it. That is why doing injustice is prohibited and punished. Doing injustice is deemed shameful in order to deter certain people from doing it; without censure or threat of punishment, their interest in their own good would move them to do it when they thought they were capable of getting away with it. Hence, it is simply impossible to conclude that doing injustice is harmful from the opinion that doing it is more shameful, since the latter opinion presupposes that doing injustice is beneficial. Provided, then, that Callicles is correct in his belief that suffering injustice is obviously more harmful than doing it, and provided his account of justice is correct at least in its broad strokes, he has effectively undone Socrates' prior arguments about the benefit of justice and of punishment.

Further, Callicles' account of conventional justice, if true, greatly discredits *nomos* as a source for guidance for living one's life. One has no reason to abide by its dictates in situations where one could get away with committing injustice. Successful injustice *is* profitable; Archelaus *is* happy. And the shame that comes from doing injustice is adventitious. There is nothing *intrinsically* wrong with doing injustice. Thus, Callicles' speech has the effect of encouraging those who think they are capable of "having more" to do so with a clear conscience. They have no reasons of conscience or interest to refrain from taking more for themselves than the law allows in situations where this is possible. It of course follows from this that (conventional) justice is in no way part of the "good order of the soul," at least not for the stronger human beings.

Finally, we should note that, according to this account, the strong and the weak have the same natural motive: the desire to have more. (Only those who are duped by convention do not perceive and act on this motive.) Because all desire to have more, while a few are capable of attaining it, there is an inescapable conflict between the interests of the weaker and the stronger. Equality is advantageous for the weaker, but not for the stronger; inequality is advantageous for the stronger, but not for the weaker. There is no room for compromise between them. One or the other must rule. Hence, Callicles is implying that there is no such thing as “the common good.” The law’s claim to serve the common good (or the mutual advantage of all citizens) is a fraud.

By itself, this argument might seem to prove that justice and nobility are wholly artificial creations of social necessity. Perhaps only self-interest, the good, is natural. Callicles has established that equality is in some people’s interest, while it is not in the interest of those who are capable of having more and do not need the protection of collectively enforced norms and laws. He has thus shown that nature and convention are opposed in the sense that the natural self-interest of the strong is opposed to the demands of *nomos*. But Callicles next makes an even stronger claim: that the just and noble *by nature* are the opposite of what convention declares them to be (483c-d). In other words, justice and nobility are not simply artificial; there are natural standards.⁵⁵ With this claim we get to the heart of Callicles’ position, and to the aspect of his critique of justice that marks him out from the interlocutors in other Socratic dialogues.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Stauffer 2006, pp. 87-88 and 87-88 n. 6.

⁵⁶ Neither Thrasymachus nor Glaucon ever mention “natural justice”; compare *Laws* 890a.

As Callicles puts it, “nature herself, I think, reveals that this very thing is just, for the better to have more than the worse and the more powerful than the less powerful” (483c-d). By convention, justice is equality; by nature, it is *inequality*.⁵⁷ He offers two pieces of evidence: the animal kingdom, and international relations between “whole cities and races of human beings” (483d). Anyone who observes these domains—where no higher, law-making or law-enforcing power holds sway—will conclude that “the just has been decided thus, for the stronger to rule the weaker and to have more” (483d). He adds further that it was *this* kind of justice which Xerxes “made use of” when he invaded Greece, and Darius when he invaded Scythia (483d-e). Those who act on this understanding of justice act in accordance with “the nature of the just” and even in accordance with “the law of nature” (*nomos tēs phuseōs*, 483e).

He then returns to the theme of conventional justice, comparing it to natural justice and explaining how convention is able to win out over nature.

By molding the best (*beltistous*) and most forceful (*errōmenestatous*) of us, catching them young, like lions, subduing them by charms and bewitching them, we reduce them to slavery, saying that one must have an equal share and that this is the noble and the just. But, I think, if a man having a sufficient nature comes into being, he shakes off and breaks through all these things and gets away, trampling underfoot our writings, spells, charms, and the laws that are all against nature, and the slave rises

⁵⁷ It is illuminating to compare this part of Callicles’ speech with its “genealogy” in the *Laws* 888e-890a.

up to be revealed as our master; and there the justice of nature shines forth. (483e-484b)

In other words, the many use praise and blame and education from birth to foist upon the better a false understanding of themselves and their own interests. The best are thereby reduced to a slavery that only the *very* best are able to free themselves from.

Callicles concludes his account of natural justice by invoking the authority of Pindar (484b-c), who, according to Callicles (at least), explained the justice of Heracles' theft of Geryon's cattle by asserting that "Law, the king of all mortals and immortals, leads, making whatever is most violent just, with highest hand" (484b).⁵⁸ He takes this to mean that Heracles' action was in accordance with the "just by nature," which commands that "the worse (*cheironōn*) and weaker (*hēttonōn*) men's cows and all other possessions belong to the better (*beltionos*) and stronger (*kreittonos*) man" (484c). With this, Callicles completes his account of natural justice, and his account of justice in general. To his mind, he has completed his refutation of Socrates, having proven that doing injustice is not worse than suffering it. Conventional justice presumes that doing injustice is better, and what the many call "doing injustice" is in fact *just* from the standpoint of nature.

To grasp the meaning of Callicles' account of natural justice, let us start with what he means by "nature." We have already seen that Callicles considers self-interest the primary natural motive. In the natural world, concern for self-interest guides

⁵⁸ "Law" (*nomos*) here evidently refers to the law of nature, not that of the many, since it is justifying Heracles' theft of Geryon's cattle.

activity.⁵⁹ His examples of nature—the animal kingdom and international relations—allow us to infer the characteristics of the natural state wherein beings pursue these interests. Put most simply, nature exists where law does not. This is the common feature of animal life and (generally) of international relations.⁶⁰ One might say, then, that in the first place Callicles takes “nature” to denote the realm where individuals or groups exist in mutually-affecting and competitive relations, and where those relations are not governed by some superior rule-making and rule-enforcing power. Thus, the two most salient features of the natural realm are competition and self-reliance, to which both of his examples attest. First, natural relations are essentially competitive. This may be either because natural appetites are insatiable, or because natural goods are relatively scarce, or both. (I doubt Callicles has considered this question with any depth.) Second, in the realm of nature an entity is secure in the enjoyment of what it possesses solely on the basis of its ability to defend what it has from outside aggression. There is no pre-existing rule of distribution, nor is there a third party to enforce it. The naturally stronger, thus, are those who are able to appropriate and defend what they have appropriated by relying solely on their own forces.⁶¹ And, in such a state, the weaker are at the mercy of the stronger. This holds true, he suggests, in the animal world and in international relations, and, to repeat what was said above, Callicles asserts that it would

⁵⁹ This self-interest is apparently not conceived of by Callicles as being exclusively egoistic, since he repeatedly mentions friends or “one’s own”; see 483b, 486a, b-c, 492c, among others. Nonetheless, he often gives the impression of egoism.

⁶⁰ Cf. Dodds 1959, p. 267.

⁶¹ The implication of this, of course, is that might is the sole title to property, and, therefore, that the weak have no rights by nature.

hold true in human relations if law did not intervene, and that the many invented law precisely in order to leave such a state.

How does such a state of affairs represent a model of true justice that Callicles claims it does? He seems to wish to say that the stronger *deserve* to rule the weaker and to have more than them. That would be the most plausible reason why he would call this state of affairs not only to the advantage of the stronger but also *just*. If this is so, then at a broad level of generality Callicles holds a fairly common conception of justice: that goods should be distributed in accordance with merit or desert.⁶² Callicles departs from ordinary opinion in his *interpretation* of this principle; namely, that the stronger deserve to have as much as their strength can get them, and the weaker deserve to suffer whatever the stronger inflict on them. Because he has clearly implied that it is noble by nature for the stronger to act in this manner, he is also claiming that the facts of nature supply a standard for nobility. The stronger, because of what they are and what they can accomplish, are nobler than the weaker. Hence he also calls the stronger the “better” (*ameinō*, 483d). Because they are better, they deserve to have more; because they are stronger, they are capable of taking it. Nature, Callicles claims, somehow can be seen to support human excellence (the *anēr*).⁶³ (We will return to this further on.) Law, on the other hand, benefits the worse and weaker at the expense of the better and stronger. One might say, then, that the core of Callicles’ objection to conventional justice is not that it is “the good of another,” but that it is *the good of the inferior*.

⁶² Cf. Irwin 1995, p. 102. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.3 and *Politics* 3.9.1-4. The primary difference from the ordinary conception would of course be that Callicles claims that the stronger deserve whatever they can take, while the weak, as already noted, would have no rights at all.

⁶³ Buzzetti (2005, p. 29) also notes this.

It is fairly clear, then, what Callicles means to say when he invokes natural justice and even “the law of nature.” Several questions remain, however; several elements of his account must be clarified before his position can be evaluated. To begin with, if natural justice consists in the stronger having more than the weaker and ruling them, one must know who precisely the “stronger” are. Callicles has been ambiguous. In the most obvious sense (as Socrates will shortly take it up), he seems to mean by “stronger” simply those with the greatest capacity to exercise physical violence or coercion against others. (That is the suggestion of his examples from nature.) At the same time, however, his invocation of natural nobility, his reference to the “real man,” and his insistence that he is talking about *justice* (and not merely unrestrained violence) and (implicitly) merit or desert—all these facts indicate that he is not talking *merely* about superiority with respect to sheer physical strength. It remains to be seen who, precisely, the stronger are. The answer to this question is important not only because it specifies his account of justice, but because it is necessarily connected to his attempt to say that the noble and the beneficial are united in nature (or at least the shameful and the harmful).

Beyond the question who the stronger are, one must also know *what* Callicles think the stronger deserve more *of*. He clearly thinks that the stronger deserve the lion’s share of the good things in life, but he has yet to specify what these things are. This is perhaps a result of his implicit assumption that “having more” is always beneficial, that there is no limit to the profit to be derived from depriving others of their goods. We saw that Polus held just such an assumption as well, and that it was this belief that led to conclude that successful injustice can be much more profitable than justice. He was not

able to defend this position. We must see how Callicles will do so, and such a defense requires that he specify what goods he has in mind and why it is always good to “have more” of them. Beyond that, he must show why the better *deserve* more, not merely that it is in their interest to have more. But how do his facts of nature teach anything about desert?

It should also be noted that his evidence from nature is not particularly convincing. I have already noted that he is possibly equivocating in his use of the term “stronger.” If he is, then the relevance of the facts of nature becomes questionable. What would lawless violence governed by physical superiority have to tell us about virtue and its rewards? If he is not talking about mere physical superiority, does nature truly show that the superior win out when law does not intervene?⁶⁴ And, even if there might be some evidence for this, Callicles must still account for why the collective superiority of the many (who, he grants, rules the few) does not render it naturally superior, even though the collective might of cities would seem to do so with respect to other cities. In sum, many questions remain.

His claims about natural justice aside, Callicles has presented a formidable critique of Socrates’ prior argument by means of his account of the origin and aim of conventional justice. He has provided a plausible account of the origin of the opinion that doing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, but which is compatible with the common sense belief that suffering injustice is worse, all while granting to Socrates the definition of the noble and shameful that the latter had been able to use to refute Polus.

⁶⁴ For example, Xerxes and Darius may have been justified (483d), but they *lost*.

Indeed, his account explains why the belief that doing injustice is more shameful *presupposes* that successful injustice is beneficial. Further, he has raised something of an internal critique of ordinary justice. Those who, according to Callicles, are duped into being genuinely (conventionally) just must surely believe that observing the standard of fairness or refraining from *pleonexia* does *not* lead to gross violations of the principle of merit or desert. But Callicles has, in fact, argued that ordinary fairness is *unfair*. It does not provide virtue with sufficient rewards. If Socrates wishes to defend his previous claims, he must do so on the basis of premises different from those he relied on in his conversation with Polus. Further, given that Socrates himself believes that “the good condition of the soul” (or virtue) is of paramount importance, he must show that being just is not, in fact, contrary to the legitimate demands of superior virtue.

2.3. The Critique of Philosophy and Exhortation to Politics (484c-486d)

Despite these lingering questions, Callicles evidently believes that he has refuted Socrates’ account of justice. Having disposed of the arguments which Socrates had associated with philosophy (see 482a-b), Callicles now criticizes philosophy itself (484c-485e). More particularly, he criticizes the life devoted to philosophy—Socrates’ life. He concludes his speech with an exhortation to Socrates to drop philosophy and go into politics (485e-486d). This part of his opening speech provides further details for understanding Callicles’ full position, because Callicles here reveals more particularly the kind of men he admires and the kind of life that they lead. We shall see that Callicles’

aspirations are, on the whole, much less radical or tyrannical than his opening speech would suggest. They hardly even seem compatible with it.

Callicles begins by saying that Socrates would recognize the truth of what he is saying if only the latter gave up philosophy and “proceed[ed] to greater things” (484c)—namely, politics. Callicles does not completely condemn philosophy, however; in fact, he claims that philosophy is a necessary and graceful part of any free person’s education (485a, c), and he blames politicians and others who avoid philosophy altogether, saying that a person who does so “will never deem himself worthy of any fine and noble affair” (485c-d). The benefits of philosophy are strictly limited, however. Philosophy is a part of the *preparation* for the serious business of life, but it is not itself part of that business. Hence it is proper for youths and lads (485a, c), but not for men. According to Callicles, if a man persists in philosophy past youth, and gives his time over to it, he renders himself ridiculous, unmanly, and deserving of a beating. Like a grown person who mumbles and goofs around like child, the grown philosopher proves that he takes neither himself nor his needs and obligations seriously (485a-d).

In general, Callicles claims that too much philosophy is the ruin (or “corruption”) of human beings (484c). With regard to a philosopher,

even if he is of an altogether good nature and philosophizes far along in age...he must of necessity become inexperienced in all those things that one who is to be a noble and good man, and well reputed, must have experience of. And indeed they become inexperienced in the laws of the city, in the speeches one must use to associate with human beings in

dealing both privately and publicly, in human pleasures and desires, and in sum they become all in all inexperienced in customs and characters (*ēthōn*). (484c-d)

On account of this inexperience, philosophers “become ridiculous” any time they attempt public or private business. As he says later, a philosopher will never accomplish “anything free or great or sufficient” (485e) and will become “unmanly” and undistinguished (485d-e). Further, he will be of no use to anyone else or to the city as a whole (486a). In short, the devotee of philosophy is left lacking “livelihood, reputation, and many other good things” (486d).

Philosophy, then, is not a good or noble way of life. The surest indication of this is the shameful dangers to which Socrates has left himself vulnerable on account of his devotion to philosophy. Near the end of Callicles’ speech, he makes an about-face, professing friendship and “goodwill” towards Socrates, and he attempts to call Socrates’ attention to these dangers. He exhorts Socrates for his own sake to change his life (485e-486d). As it stands, Socrates’ lack of practical experience renders him utterly unable to defend himself if some “very lowly and vicious accuser” were to charge him falsely with doing injustice and haul him off to jail. If such an accuser wished to persuade the jury to sentence him to death, Socrates would not know what to say in his own defense (486a-b). But how could it be “a wise thing” for him to live a way of life that makes him “unable to help himself or to save either himself or anyone else from the greatest dangers, but liable to be stripped of his whole substance by his enemies and to live absolutely unhonored

[and without political rights] in the city” (486b-c)?⁶⁵ You could slap such a person in the face and not pay a penalty. Callicles advises Socrates to leave off this unprofitable and dangerous way of life and to emulate those “noble and good...and well reputed” men (484d) “who have livelihood, reputation, and many other good things” (486d).⁶⁶

It might seem surprising that Callicles presents the soundness of his advice to Socrates as a consequence of his account of natural and conventional justice, since it seems so utterly in keeping with ordinary, respectable opinion. Surely one need not believe in the opposition between nature and convention in order to consider a way of life shameful that leaves one lacking the most basic goods in life and at the mercy of the “lowly and vicious,” or that the best course of life is one that renders a person noble and good, well-reputed, influential, and rich.

This speech reveals some of the traditional beliefs underlying Callicles’ notions of virtue or superiority, beliefs he does not owe to his conventionalist thesis.⁶⁷ He presents becoming “a noble and good man, and well reputed” as the goal of life, which, indeed, it was for most Athenian aristocrats; and he presents the life of political activity as the proper means to that end, which also would not be a particularly controversial claim. This counsel is surprising, however, coming from Callicles. The earlier part of his speech seemed to deny the existence of a common good and to extol the natural despot; now, however, at least some of his speech suggests (485d-e, 486a) that the noble and

⁶⁵ Cf. *Apology* 28b.

⁶⁶ This argument further supports the suggestion that suffering injustice is both worse and more shameful because it is a sign of lack of (manly) virtue.

⁶⁷ I am using the term “conventionalist” to denote a doctrine which proclaims that the demands of nature and the demands of convention (or law) are opposed to one another and that certain beliefs regarding virtue and conduct derive their validity solely from human agreement. See Strauss 1953, ch. 3.

good man's activity is carried out in service to the city and its good. Granted, he emphasizes the personal benefits that stem from political activity, but he does not praise it (here) exclusively for that reason (see 485e-486a, 486b-c). What accounts for this apparent tension in Callicles' position?

I suggest the following interpretation. Callicles' conception of the "noble and good man" and his belief that the better or stronger (in virtue) deserve more both antedate his exposure to the conventionalist teaching which opposes nature to convention. In his most basic character, Callicles is formed like a typical aristocrat.⁶⁸ The opposition between nature and convention *articulates* rather than gives rise to his disapproval of the domination of the virtuous few by the inferior many. (A noble citizen of Athens, he has no doubt bristled under the rule of the many for a while.) This would explain why Callicles seems to "moralize" the conventionalist teaching. That is, he takes a teaching designed to prove that justice is something wholly artificial, and that, by nature, force rules all, and he turns it into a teaching that identifies strength with aristocratic virtue and declares that nature is on the side of the virtuous. If this is correct, then Callicles will not be able to defend his account of natural justice, because the "nature" to which he is referring does not supply a standard for justice. We will see that he indeed fails.

Just as Callicles' preexisting opinions distort the conventionalist teaching, the adoption of that distorted teaching modifies his old opinions in turn, pulling them away from their original bases. The more traditional view of the relation between virtue and justice would go something like the following: those who are superior in virtue ought, by

⁶⁸ Compare, for example, *Protagoras* 316b-c, 318e-319a and *Meno* 71e.

right, to guide the city; in return for their public service, they are entitled to a greater share of the good things that the city has at its disposal (partly as a result of their labors). In this case, something like a common good would be the basis of justice, and contribution to it would be the criterion for distribution. Nonetheless, this view would agree with Callicles' statement that the better ought to rule and have more than the worse, although on the basis of a different principle. Since Callicles' understanding of the natural relations between weak and strong destroy any basis for a common good between them, Callicles cannot invoke it as a support for his conception of justice. Hence he claims, in effect, that the better deserve to be better off *because they are better*—which by itself is, of course, not an argument.

Callicles' modifications of the conventionalist teaching and his failure to think through its potential incompatibility with his understanding of nobility are beginning to lead him into contradiction. He has avoided so far the incoherence of Polus' position through his willingness to deny that doing injustice is shameful. He can further claim to have made a strong argument that justice is not in the *interest* of the stronger. He could even claim to have delivered a formidable criticism of the authority of law itself insofar as it is hypocritically concealed selfishness fraudulently claiming to serve the common good. Finally, he has leveled a direct challenge to Socrates, demanding from him some account of how his life could be anything but base when it seems to leave him at the mercy of suffering injustice at the hands of others.

Callicles has not succeeded, however, in showing how his invocation of nature proves that the noble and just is identical with the interest of the stronger, or how one can

derive a standard of merit from nature as he has presented it. In the next part of the dialogue (486d-492c), under the questioning of Socrates, Callicles will elaborate and clarify his position to the extent that it is possible for him to do so. In the process, his position will begin to collapse.

3. The Elaboration of Callicles' Position (486d-492c)

The next section of the dialogue consists of Socrates' exploration of Callicles' position, which, in the process, is reformulated and, becoming more specific, reveals some of its premises. Of the remaining questions mentioned above, Socrates pursues primarily the question *who* the stronger are (and secondarily the question what they deserve more of). Once Callicles has addressed these questions more directly, his position takes the sharp turn towards hedonism (which I discuss in the following part) that precipitates its collapse. In this section it becomes clear that the fundamental weakness of Callicles' position is the result of his own confusion over the nature of the human good and its relation to virtue.⁶⁹

3.1. The Stronger (488b-491d)

Socrates begins his investigation by restating Callicles' definition of "the just according to nature": "That the stronger (*kreittō*) carry off by violence the weaker men's things, that the superior (*beltiō*) rule the worse men, and that the better (*ameinō*) have more than the lowlier" (488b). Callicles accepts this restatement. Callicles had used an

⁶⁹ I will not discuss Socrates' ironical praise of Callicles as a true touchstone (486d-488b). On this speech, see Stauffer 2006, pp. 93-95.

array of positive terms to designate the human beings favored by nature and disfavored by law: the real man (*andros*, 483b), the more forceful (*errōmenesterous*, 483c; cf. 483a), the better (*ameinō*, 483d), the more powerful (*dunatōteron*, 483d), the stronger (*kreittō*, 483d, 484c), and the best (*beltistous*, 483e, 484c). These terms generally overlap in Greek, but with differing shades of meaning, spanning from physical superiority to social superiority to superiority in personal virtue.⁷⁰ Socrates, too, uses a number of terms in order to call attention to this. Having called attention to it, Socrates first asks whether all of these terms are equivalent in meaning. In particular, he asks whether, according to Callicles, “the stronger (*kreitton*) and the superior (*beltion*) and the mightier (*ischuroteron*) [are] the same or different” (488d). Although the last term—the mightier—was not explicitly used by Callicles, Socrates reasonably adds it and explains why: Callicles’ examples of nature—more particularly, of the activities of cities in accordance with natural justice—had seemed to equate physical superiority (might) with superiority as such (488c; cf. 483d-e).⁷¹ Accordingly, Socrates asks whether the two are the same.⁷²

Callicles answers affirmatively. Socrates then quickly leads Callicles into self-contradiction (488d-489b). On this understanding of superiority, the many are clearly collectively stronger than the few, as can be seen from the fact, which Callicles himself

⁷⁰ Callicles has likewise used an array of negative terms to designate those human beings disfavored by nature and favored by law. They are usually mentioned in the same context as the positive terms noted above, so I will not list them separately.

⁷¹ His use of the terms “more forceful” (*errōmenesteros*) and “most forceful” (*errōmenestatos*) also suggests this.

⁷² As Stauffer (2006, pp. 96-97) has argued, Socrates, through the wording of his question, has virtually ensured that Callicles will answer this question in the affirmative, since the alternative would be to claim that someone may be “superior (*beltiō*) but weaker (*hēttō*) and feebler (*asthenesteron*), and...stronger (*kreittō*) but more vicious (*mochthēroteron*)” (488c), possibilities that Callicles’ previous usage rendered impossible.

has referred to (483b-c, 483e-484b), that they dominate the stronger and give them laws.⁷³ Therefore, the laws of the many are those of the stronger and are, consequently, noble and just by nature. These laws hold that having an equal share is noble and just. Therefore, having an equal share is admirable and just not only by convention or law but by nature.⁷⁴ Callicles indignantly responds that Socrates is “driveling” and should be “ashamed...to hunt after words” at his age, pouncing on another’s person’s verbal errors and refuting them in a manner that is beside the point (489b-c). He claims that he has obviously meant all along that the stronger (*kreittous*) are the superior (*beltious*), and not “that, if a rabble of slaves and human beings of all sorts, worth nothing except perhaps for the exertion of bodily might, was collected together, and if these people asserted some things, these things are lawful” (489c). In short, Callicles had meant by “stronger” those who are superior with respect to virtue—or, to put it as Socrates might, those who are superior with respect to the virtue of the soul, not of the body. Socrates admits that he had thought Callicles meant something like this, but had wanted to be sure. He was confident that Callicles “do[es] not consider two as superior to one, nor [his] slaves superior to [him], because they are mightier than [him]” (488d), a notion which his first speech had clearly denied (see, for example, 483e-484b).

This much, however, is clear. Callicles means by “stronger” superior with respect to virtue (of soul or character), not with respect to bodily might. Consequently, he is

⁷³ Note that Socrates grants this to Callicles (488d; see also 513a-c). This is the first concession which Socrates makes to Callicles which suggests that the latter might not be entirely wrong about the origin and purpose of *nomos*.

⁷⁴ This argument, considered on its own, is not cogent; cf. Buzzetti 2005, p. 36 n. 14 and Irwin 1979, pp. 185-86.

speaking in the first place of superiority or virtue as the possession of an individual.⁷⁵ As Socrates has put it, two is not, as such, superior to one (489d). Callicles is talking about the qualities that mark out the “real man” (*anēr*, 483b), the “noble and good man” who is “well reputed” (484c) and enjoys “livelihood, reputation, and many other good things” (486d) as a result of his virtue. Natural justice, then, is for the *better* human beings to have more than the worse and to rule them.

This clarification of his position would seem to render irrelevant his examples from nature. How does Callicles’ evidence from nature support his contention that, by nature, it is *just* and *noble* for the virtuous to rule the base and have more than them, rather than that evidence merely suggesting that it is in the *interest* of virtuous to do so? In other words, why is nature partial to the virtuous, and how do these examples show this partiality?⁷⁶ Further, he has in no way proven that by nature the *more virtuous* win out. If anything, he has proven that, by nature, the inferior are capable of dominating the superior through recourse collective might. And even that formulation presupposes that Callicles’ distinction between superior and inferior is in truth natural—which his examples from nature do not establish. What *are* the virtues that mark one out as superior?⁷⁷ It is this last question that Socrates takes up next.

Having been told by Callicles that the stronger are the superior (*beltion*), Socrates next (489e) asks him who the superior are, to which Callicles responds, “the better”

⁷⁵ Treating “cities and races of human beings” as units, even if only by virtue of being dominated or ruled by a powerful individual such as Xerxes.

⁷⁶ Cf. Irwin 1979, pp. 186-87.

⁷⁷ One should also ask why Callicles suggests and for a moment even agrees to the identification of superiority with physical might. I will return to this last question after discussing Callicles’ second long speech (at 491e-492c).

(*ameinous*, a close synonym for *beltiōn*). Socrates accuses Callicles of replacing one word with another but not making anything clear, and he makes a suggestion to help Callicles clarify his meaning: by stronger, superior, and better, does he mean more prudent (*phronimōterous*, 489e; cf. 486c)?⁷⁸ Callicles emphatically agrees. Socrates reformulates Callicles' definition of natural justice accordingly: "Many times, therefore, one man who thinks prudently (*phronōn*) is stronger...than ten thousand who do not, and this man ought to rule, and those be ruled, and the ruler have more than the ruled" (490a). Callicles concurs, saying that "the just by nature" is "for one who is superior and more prudent both to rule and to have more than the lowlier ones (*phauloterōn*)" (490a).

Socrates proceeds to confute Callicles by drawing from this definition a number of consequences that Callicles finds ridiculous and beside the point (490b-491a).

Socrates proposes the following scenario. Suppose there are a number of different people gathered together, some of whom are weaker, some stronger. Suppose, further, that they have food and drink in common, and that, among them, there is a doctor who is stronger than some, weaker than others, and that this doctor, by virtue of his knowledge, is "superior and stronger" with respect to knowledge of the proper distribution of food and drink. Now, clearly, the doctor should not, on account of his knowledge, keep all the provisions for himself and his own body, since, by doing so, he would "pay a fine" (*zēmiousthai*—in the form, no doubt, of overeating and sickness). Rather, he should

⁷⁸ It is very difficult to find a proper translation for *phronimos* in the *Gorgias*. Adkins (1960, pp. 244-46) has glossed it as "intelligent in practical matters." Nichols translates the word (and its relatives) "intelligent." *Phronimos* is the adjectival equivalent to the noun *phronēsis*, which is often translated "prudent." I have used "prudent" even though it sometimes has the wrong connotations (especially when it comes to Callicles' use of the term). Adkins' gloss is too cumbersome to serve as a translation, while "intelligent" is too vague. Hopefully context will make the meaning sufficiently clear. I have substituted "prudent" (or variants thereof) for "intelligent" in my quotations from Nichols' translation.

distribute those provisions among all and with respect to the need or good of each, which entails that, if the doctor is feeblest of all, he should have the least (490b-c).

Callicles irritably says that he is not talking about such drivel as this (490c-d), and that, although he agrees that the superior man is more prudent and ought to have more, he is not talking about having more of things such as food and drink (490c-d). Socrates goes on to propose three more examples of the same kind, progressively irritating Callicles more. Should a weaver wear the most and most beautiful cloaks? Should the cobbler wear the most and biggest shoes? Should the farmer keep all the seeds for his own land (490d)? Callicles says that Socrates keeps saying the same thing over and over again, even though the “more prudent” under discussion are not “cobblers, clothiers, cooks, and doctors” (490e-491a). Socrates implores him, then, to say who precisely they *are* talking about, and what they justly take more of (491a).

It should be clear that Callicles did not have in mind the forms of technical expertise to which Socrates refers, though Socrates rightfully pushes Callicles to be more specific, since, as we saw in the exchange with Gorgias, expertise is always *about something*. Socrates may illicitly equate *phronēsis* with *technē* and *technē* with rule (thereby misrepresenting what Callicles means), but Callicles himself has not said with respect to what a person must be more prudent in order to count as superior. Until he does so, one cannot determine whether or how such prudence could justify the prudent person’s claim to “have more.”

Socrates’ examples further illuminate some of the premises of Callicles’ position, insofar as his examples rest on incompatible premises. In particular, Socrates’

hypothetical cases presuppose two things that Callicles has denied: an identity of interests between ruler and ruled, and the availability of enough good things for everybody to get what is necessary and satisfactory. In the example of the doctor and the provisions, it is clearly in the interest of the whole group—because it is in the interest of each member of the group—that the doctor determine the distribution of provisions in accordance with the needs of each member. Too little food or drink would be harmful; too much would be either harmful or useless. In this respect, then, Socrates' example may seem to presuppose the common interest between ruler and ruled—something Callicles has (at least part of the time) denied. But Socrates' example has also put an aspect of Callicles' account into question. With respect to the doctor and the provisions, there seems to be a natural limit with respect to the products of the art, which, when reached, supplies the maximum benefit of which the art is capable. A person can only eat so much, wear so much clothes (depending on the weather), and a piece of land can support only so many seeds. In all these cases, being well off with respect to the objects of the art consists in *having just the right amount*, not in “having more.” But Callicles had asserted (or implied) that it is always beneficial for the stronger to “have more” than the weaker, and that this is what natural justice prescribes. We must ask again, more of what? Callicles has yet to specify the conception of human well-being on which he depends when he asserts that having more is a good thing.

With respect to the second premise of Socrates' example—which could be called lack of scarcity—it would seem that he is stacking the deck against Callicles. Why should we assume that, in human affairs, there is enough to go around? And, if there is

not, why should people (even doctors) not prefer their own needs before others? In conditions of scarcity, the harmony of interests among people and between ruler and ruled breaks down. Further, there are goods that do not have obvious natural limits, either because, like money, there might not seem to be any limit to their profitable accumulation, or because, like honor or power, they are essentially relative. Yet these would seem to be precisely the kinds of goods that Callicles has in mind. To that extent, Socrates has not spoken to Callicles' concerns. On the other hand, Socrates could argue that the goods he discusses (food, clothes) are preeminently natural, while the goods Callicles is concerned with (honor, wealth, power) are essentially based on convention or human opinion—a strange turnaround for the champion of nature over *nomos*.

The bearing of these considerations cannot be fully determined, however, until the nature of the human good or human well-being becomes clearer. Only when this is discovered can the relevant form of expertise be identified, and only then can one investigate the extent to which this expertise entitles its possessor to a greater share of its object.

To return to the text, Socrates' examples of cobblers and cooks finally provoke Callicles to give a more specific definition of the stronger: "...by those who are stronger I mean neither cobblers nor cooks, but those who are prudent with regard to the affairs of the city and in what way they may be well governed—and not only prudent but also courageous (*andreioi*), being sufficient to accomplish what they intend and not flinching

[or “slackening”] through softness of soul” (491a-b).⁷⁹ Socrates accuses Callicles of changing his definition once again, making manliness (or courage) rather than prudence the mark of superiority, and he implore Callicles to say once and for all who the superior and stronger are and with respect to what (491b-c). Callicles, insisting with irritation that he has already said it, replies, “those who are prudent in regard to the affairs of the city and courageous. For it is fitting (*prosēkei*) that these men rule the cities, and the just is this, that these, the rulers, have more than the others, the ruled” (491c-d).⁸⁰

This is Callicles’ final attempt in the dialogue to define the stronger and naturally superior human being, so it is striking how much it resembles ordinary, respectable opinion (if with an aristocratic bias). His immediately recalls the second rather than the first part of Callicles’ opening speech (484c-486d). Practical intelligence with regard to political affairs, combined with manliness in pursuit of one’s plans, are surely recognized characteristics of the “noble and good man” (*kalos kagathos*), the “natural born leader” of the political community who fittingly rules those less blessed by nature and education, and who enjoys a greater share of honors and wealth as a due reward for his indispensable service to the community.⁸¹

⁷⁹ The word *andreios* is derived from the same root as *anēr*, and so could be translated “manly”—that is, having those qualities which a “real man” ought to possess. The Greek word for courage (*andreia*) also comes from the same root.

⁸⁰ Irwin (1979, pp. 189-90) points out that “it is fitting” is used ambiguously here. It could mean either the expected and usual way of things or the way things ought to turn out.

⁸¹ This definition also clearly anticipates the apparent admiration for Pericles, Miltiades, Cimon, and Themistocles later in the dialogue at 503c, 515d, and 517a-b. For similarly common aristocratic views of virtue, see *Protagoras* 316b-c, 318e-319a. Comparison with Meno is particularly instructive. Meno offers definitions of virtue almost identical to those of Callicles: “to be capable of carrying out the affairs of the city and, in doing so, to benefit friends, harm enemies, and take care that he himself not suffer any such thing” (71e); and “to be able to rule human beings” (73c). He even offers a definition of virtue that resembles the one given in Callicles’ speech in praise of intemperance (at 491e-492c). He declares virtue to be “for one who desires the noble things to be capable of providing them for himself” (77b), and further

Seen on its own, this definition of the stronger in no way necessarily rests upon the account of *nomos* and natural justice that Callicles delivered earlier.⁸² In fact, it could be seen to clash with it. He says that it is fitting for the stronger to rule because they are more prudent with regard to governing well (*eu oikoito*) the affairs of the city. On its face, this statement seems to imply the existence of a common good—something that he had previously denied. As with the aristocratic understanding just mentioned, it is “fitting” for such men to rule because it is best for everybody. It would be just for them to have more in return, since they have contributed more to the well-being of the city as a whole. But this manner of justifying the rule of the stronger seems utterly incompatible with the vision of nature and rule that Callicles had presented before. It is possible, however, that Callicles has some as-yet unrevealed understanding of “governing well” which *is* compatible with his account of natural justice. The limited extent to which this is true will come to light in the subsequent section. For now, we can say that a potential fault-line has now appeared, although Callicles has not yet explicitly contradicted himself.

Regardless of whether Callicles’ definition of the stronger is consistent with his definition of natural justice, his definition of the stronger renders highly questionable the evidence from nature that he had used to support his position. Affairs in the animal

agrees that the “noble things” are the “good things” (77b-c), and, hence, that virtue is the power or “capacity to provide good things for oneself” (78b-c). Further, his understanding of the “good things” is nearly identical to that of Callicles: health, wealth, money, honor, and political offices (78c). Meno seems to differ from Callicles primarily because he *also* classes justice and moderation among the virtues (73b, 73d-e, 74a, 78d-e). Otherwise put, he seems to differ in his ignorance (or rejection) of the opposition between nature and convention.

⁸² Callicles’ manner of characterizing the stronger here supports my earlier suggestion that Callicles’ understanding of superiority is not essentially derived from knowledge of nature but from his aristocratic upbringing.

kingdom seem obviously beside the point. It is possible that developing a city's capacity to conquer other cities qualifies as "governing" a city "well," but the extent to which the best city always wins is questionable, as we have already seen. In both cases, might does seem the more relevant quality that determines success. It is seriously questionable whether Callicles' conception of virtue, nobility, and justice is in any way reflected in or supported by the lawless nature to which he initially appealed.

3.2. Virtue and Happiness (491d-492c)

Although Callicles' definition of the stronger in no way clarifies the *natural* basis for his conception of justice and nobility, Socrates does not pursue this avenue of questioning. Rather, he abruptly changes the topic, asking the puzzled Callicles whether the stronger also rule themselves. When Callicles asks Socrates what he means by this, Socrates replies, "Nothing complicated but just what the many mean: being moderate (*sōphrona*) and in control of oneself (*enkratē...heautou*), ruling the pleasures and desires that are in oneself" (491d-e).⁸³ Callicles mocks Socrates' amusing naivety, telling him that, by this way of speaking, foolish people (*ēlithious*) are moderate (491e). When Socrates protests that this is obviously not what he means, Callicles delivers his second and last long speech in defense of his conception of natural justice and nobility (491e-492c).

⁸³ It seems natural that Socrates would bring up moderation, since natural justice would seem to be at odds with moderation insofar as it assumes that a limitless, selfish grasping for more at the expense of others leads to greater and greater happiness.

Saying that no one can be happy if enslaved to anyone at all, Callicles asserts that “the noble and just according to nature” prescribes that “the man who will live correctly must let his own desires be as great as possible and not chasten (*mē kolazein*) them,⁸⁴ and he must be sufficient to serve them, when they are as great as possible, through courage [or “manliness”] and prudence, and to fill them up with the things for which desire arises on each occasion” (491e-492a; trans. altered). It is only by convention that immoderation or intemperance (*akolasia*) is deemed shameful. Just as the weak (and their laws) blame “having more” out of self-interest, they blame immoderation (the desire to have more) for the same reason. It is, we see here, the very motive for “injustice” as they determine it. Through their blame they “enslave[e] the human beings who are superior in their nature” (492a; cf. 483e-484a)—that is, they deter them from acting on their natural and justified desire for more. What is more, the weak blame intemperance and praise moderation in order to conceal their own “incapacity” (492a) and “unmanliness” (*anandrian*, 492b). That is, they know that intemperance is a good thing and leads to great happiness, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of in itself, but they also know that they are lowly and defective and incapable of seizing the good things in life. Consequently, out of self-protection, shame, and vanity, they praise people like themselves, and those who act in a manner that beneficial to them, and they blame their natural superiors.

Callicles goes on to say that anybody who had the capacity to “have more,” and to slough off conventional justice, would be a fool not to do so. Those who are born in a position of kingly rule, or who have the native capacity to seize some form of arbitrary

⁸⁴ The verb *kolazein* is elsewhere translated “to punish.”

rule for themselves, would act in a shameful and harmful way if they followed the many's standards of moderation and justice. Why would those "who can enjoy the good things (and with no one blocking their path)...impose a master (*despotēn*) on themselves [in the form of] the law (*nomon*) and speech and blame of the many human beings" (492b)? Such people would render themselves wretched thereby, "under the sway of this fine (*kalou*) thing, justice and moderation," since they would "distribute nothing more to their own friends than to enemies—and this while ruling in their own city" (492c). If Socrates really pursues the truth that he claims to pursue, and is not merely claiming to do so, then he must recognize that "luxury, intemperance, and freedom, when they have support" constitute "virtue and happiness" (492c). Law and equality, on the other hand, "are drivels and worth nothing" because they are mere "agreements of human beings against nature" (492c).

This speech brings a kind of specious clarity to Callicles' position. It might seem to resolve the tensions between nature and convention within Callicles' own account by abolishing those aspects of his position that seem to have their roots in the *nomos* that he otherwise criticizes. In particular, it would appear that Callicles' aspirations are unabashedly tyrannical and selfish, not aristocratic. The goal in life is "luxury, intemperance, and freedom" for oneself, rule over others, and gratification of one's own pleasures and desires.⁸⁵ Further, the aristocratic virtues of manliness and prudence are reinterpreted as "support" for the desires. That is, the virtues are rendered wholly subservient to the desires, instrumental to their satisfaction, while it is the satisfaction of

⁸⁵ Here we see Callicles' agreement with Gorgias and Polus that rule over others or the ability to do whatever seems good to oneself is the greatest good.

the desires themselves (on a large scale) that makes up the substance of happiness. Further, any hint of a common good or super-personal good is erased from this account. Political rule is desirable solely for selfish ends; and even helping friends and harming enemies is presented as important merely or primarily for the preservation or enhancement of one's own good (see 492c).⁸⁶ It might seem, then, that Callicles has freed himself from the effects of convention.

With this speech in hand, we also can perhaps now explain the “error” that Callicles fell into earlier when he mistakenly identified the superior with the physically stronger (488d-489c). We see now that Callicles believes that the primary or sole task of virtue is to make a “real man” capable of serving his own interests. Its essence is to make a person successful. A person is “strong” precisely because he possesses virtue, and he is successful because of that strength. Thus seen, virtue resembles sheer might to a degree that renders them perhaps indistinguishable. A person with more virtue overpowers a person with less virtue in a contest of virtue in the same way that a person with more strength overpowers a person with less strength in a contest of strength. Of course, we have already remarked that Callicles is aware that virtue is not infallibly “irresistible” (see 483c, 483e-484a). He exaggerates. This exaggeration suggests that Callicles *wishes* for virtue to be as irresistible in human affairs as physical might is in contests of strength.⁸⁷ Callicles' examples of nature could be seen to support this wish. Stronger animals are stronger because they are better. Stronger cities are stronger because they are

⁸⁶ We have already seen that Callicles is not indifferent to the good of others. Nonetheless, in the speech presently under discussion, he reproaches the inability to help friends because this inability will render a person “wretched.” He does not lament the shirking of a duty, but the inability to serve one's own good.

⁸⁷ Buzzetti (2005, p. 35) suggests this as well.

better. Their success proves their superior capacity to serve their own interests, and this capacity just *is* virtue.

The supposed clarity of this section is partly the result of exaggeration on Callicles' part. He has, in a sense, been provoked by Socrates yet again. Callicles has already become annoyed at what he perceives to be Socrates' deliberately obtuse questioning regarding who the stronger are. Under the pressure of that questioning, we saw Callicles shifting from the tyrannical conception of the stronger present in the first part of his speech (483b-484c) to the more common, aristocratic conception implicit in his final definition of the stronger (491a-b, c-d). Now that he has finally given his answer, Socrates incites him even further by asking a question that Callicles surely thinks is deliberately wrong-headed. Callicles has said repeatedly the stronger can and should "have more" at the expense of the many; Socrates has now turned around and asked him whether the stronger will be "moderate" in accordance with the standards of the many—something Callicles has clearly, if implicitly, denied, or at least which is obviously at odds with the premises of his whole position, since it implies that superior human beings will be content with mediocre fortunes proper to the commonest of citizens. In response to this absurd implication, Callicles delivers an outburst meant to put an end to Socrates' misunderstandings, lurching from the aristocratic conception of superiority back to the tyrannical and emphasizing the expansive, even rapacious way of life he claims is proper to the stronger.

This does not necessarily imply, however, that the tyrannical position is his “true” position. In fact, what this speech reveals (more clearly than any previous one) is how profoundly confused Callicles is. Even further, this speech compounds his confusion.

Before explaining why, I should mention one weakness of his position that would remain even if his second speech was entirely consistent with what he had said before. If we grant that we now know who Callicles has in mind when he speaks of the “stronger,” we are still no closer to knowing why it is naturally just and noble for them to hold tyrannical sway over the weaker and take for themselves whatever is in their power. The examples from nature in his first speech (483d-e) do not seem to support his case once physical might is no longer equated with superiority. The current speech adds no new examples from nature, nor does it reinterpret the previous ones. As far as nature goes, he says merely that the *nomoi* are “fine pretenses [and] agreements...against nature” (492c). He had made that point before, however, when he argued in essence that everyone believes it to be in one’s own interest to “have more,” and that, for tactical reasons only, convention imposes a limit on self-interest; but that shows only that conventional justice and natural *interest* are opposed, not that it is *just* or *noble* for the stronger to pursue their interests without limitation. If Callicles is correct about what constitutes virtue, one might say that such a life is noble since it manifests virtue, the source of nobility. That argument alone, however, proves only that justice may not be noble, not that (true) justice and nobility (and benefit) coincide.

One way in which Callicles’ second speech compounds his confusion is, therefore, by confirming the suspicion that Callicles’ notions of justice, desert, and

superiority are *not* derived from a true understanding of the implications of the distinction between nature and law. He has invoked “nature” as a true standard in the name of which he can reject the false standards offered by law, but his disapproval of the standards of law is not the result of mediation on nature. Rather, as I have suggested, his condemnation of *nomos* results from his perception that it insufficiently rewards those who are truly virtuous. However, his notions of virtue and of desert are not, in the first instance, “natural.” Since the present speech is Callicles’ last attempt to clarify his own position, and since it does not resolve the problems that came to light in his first speech, this serves to confirm my hypothesis (pp. 32-33 above) that Callicles has unwittingly “moralized” the conventionalist teaching.

I had also suggested above that, just as Callicles’ preexisting moral convictions distort his understanding of the conventionalist teaching, that teaching in turn alters his moral convictions. This second speech confirms that suggestion. We have already noted that, according to traditional aristocratic beliefs, not only prudence and courage, but also moderation and justice are virtues of a “real man” (see footnote 53 above). Yet we have seen Callicles reject both justice and now moderation. Even more so than his rejection of conventional justice, his rejection of moderation is made possible by the conventionalist teaching. The value of moderation is, of course, implicitly denied by the belief that “having more” is always a good thing, but this opinion has clearly been shown to be kept in check or counter-balanced by another belief that immoderation (at least if unjust) is shameful. Callicles’ invocation of nature and his condemnation of *nomos* allow him to reject that counter-balancing belief.

This rejection might, as mentioned above, be thought to render Callicles more consistent. I have suggested that it in fact compounds his confusion, and now this can be seen more clearly. In his second speech, Callicles embraces two virtues (prudence and courage) and praises them entirely for their *instrumental* value. Happiness, he suggests, lies in the gratification of great appetites, while prudence and courage are the “supports” that make this gratification possible. Virtue, it would seem, is not good in itself but for the sake of its consequences. It is extrinsically linked to happiness. That is the necessarily implication of this speech. If Callicles truly believed that virtue is valuable as a means but not as an end, then the present speech *would* render him consistent. But he does not. This is the fundamental confusion of his position: he does not know or cannot decide whether virtue is an intrinsic part of human well-being or only a means to well-being, which lies elsewhere. His attempt to concoct a notion of “natural justice” which necessarily links virtue and happiness without identifying them is an attempt to avoid resolving this confusion, and it is inherently unstable. This observation will be confirmed and expanded in the following section.

These considerations do not, however, do away with the challenge that Callicles has leveled to law. He could still be right about its origins, its intent, its inconsistency, and its fraudulence. Further, it could still remain the case that law is “unfair” in its treatment of the truly virtuous, even if Callicles cannot explain how or why. He may be pointing to a genuine problem that eludes his comprehension.

4. The Collapse of Callicles’ Position (492d-527e)

Much of Socrates' conversation with Callicles remains—including, of course, Socrates' refutation of him. Nonetheless, I will comment in less detail on much of the remaining portion of the dialogue. The focus of this chapter has been Callicles and his critique of justice. Although Callicles reveals further important aspects of his position in the remainder of the dialogue, in most of it he contributes almost nothing to the conversation. I will focus on Callicles' contributions, as well as Socrates' arguments to the extent that they shed further light on the problem of justice as it has emerged in the dialogue. I will also remark on certain general characteristics of Socrates' defense of justice, which will be useful for future comparison with the defense he offers in the *Republic*.

The remainder of the dialogue can, for our purposes, be divided into roughly two parts: the first part (492d-508c) consists of what could be called the “formal refutation” of Callicles' position, containing within it Socrates' pivotal refutation of hedonism (495c-508c). In the final portion of the dialogue (508c-527e), Socrates draws the practical consequences of his position, one of which is a critique of the politicians (and political activity) that Callicles admires (515b-519b; cf. 503a-d). As we shall see, once Callicles' positions begin to fall under cross-examination, he becomes withdrawn from the conversation (and at two points tries to leave the conversation altogether—see 497a-c and 505c-d), neither persuaded by Socrates nor willing to defend his own position any further (with a few exceptions; see 511a, 517a-b, and 521b). As a result, Socrates refutes Callicles without persuading him, just as happened with Polus. Callicles leaves the

conversation with apparently the same opinions with which he entered it (compare 522c with 486a-c).

Despite Callicles' insufficiency as an interlocutor in this section, he reveals two final and important aspects of his own position. First, his half-hearted defense of hedonism proves that Callicles has a confused notion of the nature of human well-being, and, in particular, is unsure about the nature of the happiness that virtue can (and ought to) issue in. In other words, he retains a modified form of Polus' problem: the disjunction of the noble and the beneficial. This undermines his conception of natural justice, since, although the latter has a determinate subject (the "stronger"), Callicles is unable to provide it with a clear object ("more" of what?). Second, Callicles' deepest motives for asserting this "natural justice" and for his own activity (his "love of the people" and flattery of the assembly; see 481d-e) are revealed in his expressed indignation at the fact that base human beings can harm noble and good ones (511b) and in his inability to be persuaded by Socrates' response to this indignation (see 513c).⁸⁸

4.1. The Refutation of Callicles (492d-508c)

Once Callicles has completed his defense of the claim that "virtue and happiness" lie in "luxury, intemperance, and freedom" (491e-492c), Socrates immediately praises him for speaking so frankly, and he adds that Callicles "is now saying distinctly what the others [presumably Gorgias and Polus] think but are unwilling to say" (492d). He exhorts Callicles to continue on this way, "so that how one must live may really become

⁸⁸ That Callicles' reaction is properly termed "indignation" and not merely anger is established by Buzzetti (2005, p. 42, n. 22).

thoroughly clear” (492d; cf. 487e-488a). He then restates Callicles’ position (with the latter’s approval) as follows: virtue and living as one should consist in letting one’s desires grow as great as possible without chastening them, and “prepar[ing] satisfaction for them from any place whatsoever” (492d). Socrates then asks whether “those who need nothing” can be said, in this case, to be happy. Callicles denies this, saying that “in this way stones and corpses would be happiest” (492e).

Only at this point does Socrates truly begin his refutation of Callicles’ position. He starts by telling two parables (493a-494a) aimed at showing Callicles that the way of life the latter is advocating “is also terrible” (492e). Both of these parables—that of the Water Carriers (493a-c) and of the Leaky Jars (493d-494a)—are meant to illustrate the futile exertion that accompanies the constant striving to satisfy “insatiable and intemperate” desires, and to show that an “orderly life, sufficient and satisfied with the things that are ever at hand” (493c-d) is preferable and less painful.⁸⁹ Callicles is unconvinced and, after the second parable, finally says why: “...the man who has filled his jars [that is, has satisfied his moderate desires] no longer has any *pleasure*; indeed this, as I was saying just now, is living just like a stone, when one has been filled up, no longer either rejoicing or feeling pain. But living pleasantly consists in this, in keeping as much as possible flowing in” (494a-b, italics mine).

This statement ushers in the discussion of what is now called hedonism: the identification of the good with the pleasant. Callicles half-heartedly defends hedonism,

⁸⁹ It should be remarked that here Socrates is referring to moderation or orderliness as they are commonly conceived of. Later on, when Socrates gives his explicit defense of moderation (504d, 506c-507c), the meaning of this term has shifted.

but finally admits that he does not believe it (at 499b). This was clear at the outset (495a), however. He defends hedonism not because he believes it, but for the sake of argument, so as not to be refuted (495a). How, then, does Callicles end up in a position where he must defend hedonism in order not to be refuted? What about Callicles' genuine beliefs places him so close to hedonism that he finds himself inadvertently defending it?

In the opening parts of his exchange with Socrates, he had spoken about the stronger being entitled to more of "the good things," without being particularly specific about what these good things are beyond wealth and reputation (see 484c, 486d, 492b). In the speech recently concluded, he had vehemently endorsed intemperance, claiming that happiness consists in having and luxuriously satisfying the greatest possible pleasures and desires (491e-492c). The primary meaning of intemperance is, of course, the pursuit of excessive pleasure (cf. Socrates' definition of moderation at 491d-e). Thus, one might consider that Callicles has already all but adopted a hedonist position. He has not gone so far, however. He has said, in effect, that pleasure is necessary for a happy life, and that the happiest life will be the most pleasant, and the most pleasant life will be the one in which the greatest possible desires are satisfied (see 491e-492a, 494a-b, 494c). This does not entail, however, either that all pleasures are good or that only pleasure is good, nor does it entail the claim that pleasure is sufficient for happiness.

Yet these are the claims that Callicles will shortly defend, and, at first glance, this seems to be the result of his careless and impatient responses to Socrates' questions. To begin with, he grants Socrates' rephrasing of his own position as asserting that one must

“prepare satisfaction for [one’s desires] from any place whatsoever” (492d), even though Callicles had not said that any gratification is as good as any other one. Indeed, his insistence on the “greatness” of one’s desires suggests that he is thinking about especially magnificent desires, the kind that might characterize the Great King; and his agreement that one must “prepare satisfaction...from any place whatsoever” is more plausibly glossed as “without respect to the generally recognized prohibitions or limitations.” Callicles is careless yet again when, growing impatient with Socrates’ questions about what he means by “filling up” one’s desires, he says that “one who has all the other desires and can fulfill them, rejoices and lives happily” (494c). This would seem to be a double mistake, implying, as it does, that one ought to satisfy any and every desire, and that satisfying any desire whatsoever is sufficient to make a person happy. This is confirmed when he grants to Socrates that a person who scratches an itch lives pleasantly and, consequently, happily (494c-d), which he seems to allow without taking this line of questioning seriously.

At this point, however, he seems to have committed himself to a hedonist position. He resists Socrates momentarily when he says that the latter should be “ashamed” for suggesting that catamites who get “an ungrudging amount of what they want” (494e) are happy.⁹⁰ Socrates, however, claims that Callicles himself has led the conversation in this direction when the latter claimed “that those who rejoice—in whatever way they may rejoice—are happy” and did “not distinguish among pleasures

⁹⁰ More specifically, he suggests that Socrates ought to be ashamed to lead the conversation into such topics. But his comments at 495b show that he thinks it obvious that he is not talking about such people and that his argument does not entail Socrates’ conclusion about catamites and such things.

what sort are good and what sort bad” (494e-495a). And, whatever Callicles may have implied, his words clearly bear out Socrates’ contention. Socrates then asks him whether he indeed “assert[s] that the pleasant and the good are the same” (495a). Callicles apparently recognizes the accuracy of Socrates charge, because, in response to this question, he says, “In order that the speech should not contradict me, if I assert that they are different, I assert that they are the same” (495a). In other words, Callicles does not truly hold this position (see 499b), but he grants that his words have led him to it, and he therefore adopts it in order to avoid refutation.

Even if it is true that Callicles’ carelessness gets him into a situation where he must defend a position he does not believe, we must still ask *why* he is so careless. There are two related reasons. First, he is not taking the *content* of the conversation seriously at this point. He considers his own position obvious, and he believes that Socrates is not disputing it sincerely but merely out of contentiousness and the desire to refute (see, for example, 495b). Hence, he has little reason to choose his words carefully. More important, however, is the second reason. It seems to me that Callicles has not made clear to himself what criterion distinguishes good from bad pleasures. His praise of intemperance, when combined with his evident contempt for the catamite, suggests that his true position is that the one who would live correctly must be intemperate with respect to good desires and pleasures, and should abstain from bad or shameful ones; but he has never been very precise about what these “good things” are and what makes them

good.⁹¹ And his praise of intemperance certainly might suggest that he thinks things are good simply insofar as they bring pleasure. Thus, Callicles ends up speaking like a hedonist out of carelessness with respect to the conversation and imprecision with respect to what the “good things” are or what happiness is.⁹²

Thus, by 495c Callicles has stumbled into defending the following position. The good is the pleasant. Every pleasure is good insofar as it is pleasant, and no pleasure, considered as such, is bad. Further, any pleasure is as good as any other pleasure, and all pleasures are equal, at least “qualitatively.” Also, even though Callicles has implied that some pleasures are more intense than others (and thus more desirable), he has now endorsed the claim that the enjoyment of any pleasure whatsoever is sufficient to render a person happy for so long that pleasure lasts. All pleasures are equally sufficient, by their very presence, to render their possessor happy. Having begun by claiming that the enjoyment of great pleasures is necessary for happiness, he now defends the claim that the enjoyment of just any pleasure is sufficient for happiness.⁹³

Socrates now offers two refutations of this position (495c-499b). Their details are not important for our purposes. They are both formally unpersuasive, but do not receive

⁹¹ Indeed, the circularity of his position is beginning to become apparent. He praises the virtues for their capacity to provide gratification. In rejecting the catamite, however, he seems to use virtue (or the noble) as a standard for judging the worthiness of pleasures. I will say more about this below.

⁹² As for why he opts to defend a position he does not hold, I think that Nichols (1998b, pp. 143-44) is essentially correct to claim that it is out of a sense of “manliness in argument.” At this point his object is not to succumb to Socrates’ refutation.

⁹³ Given his evident denial of a common good and of the authority of *nomos*, Callicles might reasonably adopt hedonism as the most plausible alternative. Nothing in the conversation establishes that Callicles’ defends hedonism for such an articulate reason, however; nor is there evidence that he is capable of giving an articulate defense of this position. Callicles thus does not defend the most formidable form of hedonism.

articulate resistance from Callicles.⁹⁴ Putting aside the cogency of the arguments, they nonetheless have two very important effects for the conversation. First, Callicles almost completely disengages himself from the conversation. We have already seen ample evidence that, from the beginning, Callicles' has been somewhat carelessly imprecise and has not taken Socrates' position seriously.⁹⁵ Now, however, he tries to leave the conversation altogether, staying in only in order to gratify Gorgias' desire to see the argument completed (497a-c).⁹⁶ Hence, with a few exceptions (511a-c, 516d, 517a-b, 521b), Callicles at this point ceases to put up any serious resistance to Socrates' arguments. This means, of course, that those arguments do not receive the scrutiny that they deserve—or, otherwise put, that Callicles proves himself not to be a true “touchstone” (see 488a). The second, related, effect of the refutation of hedonism is that it allows Socrates to reintroduce (after long hiatus) the schema of true and false arts that he first presented in conversation with Polus (beginning at 463a). The reintroduction of this classification (along with its premises) is the first step towards Socrates' formal refutation of Callicles' position (which is completed at 508c).

In his first refutation of hedonism (495e-497d), Socrates argues as follows. A person cannot “do well” (*eu prattein*, that is, be happy) and do badly at the same time; but a person can feel pleasure and pain at the same time; therefore, doing well is not the same thing as feeling pleasure, nor is doing badly the same as feeling pain; but, since to

⁹⁴ See Irwin 1979's commentary on these passages (pp. 199-206) for a detailed account of their deficiencies.

⁹⁵ See 487c-d, 489b-c, 491a, 491e, 494d, and 495a-b.

⁹⁶ In light of Socrates' later suggestion that refutation is a form of beneficial punishment or corrective treatment of the sort a doctor provides, it is worth recalling in this context the role that Gorgias says he sometimes plays in assisting his brother's medical practice (see 456b).

do well and be happy is to have the good, the pleasant is therefore not the same as the good.⁹⁷ Callicles attempts to leave the argument in the course of this refutation (at 497a) but agrees to stay at the urging of Gorgias (497b-c).

Perceiving that Callicles is unpersuaded by his first refutation, Socrates offers a second one (497d-499b), which speaks more directly than the first to Callicles' concerns. Socrates begins by securing Callicles' agreement to the proposition that good men are called good "because of the presence of good things, just as" a person is called beautiful on account of the presence of beauty (497e). As was clear earlier, however, Callicles calls good those who are courageous and prudent—that is, virtuous people (497e; cf. 491a-d, 498c). In other words, Callicles distinguishes between good men (the "stronger") and bad men (the "weaker") in accordance with the presence or absence of *virtues*; the virtues are the "good things" by the presence of which he calls good men good. But he has just said that pleasure is the good, which would imply that anyone who rejoices or feels pleasure is, because of this, good. But fools and cowards are just as capable of rejoicing (if not more so) as the prudent and the courageous. Therefore, Callicles is asserting that the good and the bad are equally good, or the bad even better than the good (498d), which is, of course, self-contradictory.⁹⁸ Therefore, if Callicles wishes to identify the good with the pleasant, good and bad human beings cannot be distinguished by the presence or absence of virtue.

⁹⁷ The argument is more complicated than this—involving the fact that one ceases from pain and pleasure at the same time, but one does not cease being well-off and badly-off at the same time—but I have presented what seems to me to be the core contention. For the adequacy of this argument, see, again, Irwin 1979, pp. 201-02, 204—where Irwin helpfully points out that, among other things, this argument is insufficient to refute the hedonist position Socrates himself takes in the *Protagoras*.

⁹⁸ This argument confuses Callicles, and Socrates spells it out a second time (498d-499b).

This argument is unsatisfactory but illuminating, because it finally induces Callicles to make the following admission: “I have been listening to you for a long time now, Socrates, and agreeing right along, pondering that, if someone is joking and grants you anything, you are pleased with it and hold on to it just as young lads do. As if you thought that I or any other human being did not consider some pleasures better (*beltious*) and others worse” (499b). That is, he finally admits that he is not a hedonist (see again 495a).

Although Callicles now says what he truly thinks, his admission gives the clearest indication yet of his fundamental confusion. He has spoken of the “good things” many times, and has implied that, among these things are good reputation, rule, wealth, and pleasure, with pleasure given a privileged position. But there is, of course, a division in his notion of the good. The good things by the presence of which he calls men good (the virtues) are not identical with the good things by the presence of which he calls happy people happy (pleasure, and so forth). It is unclear how he relates these two classes of good things. Even though he obviously believes that the life of the catamite is shameful and unworthy (see again 494e), and even though he admits here that he distinguishes between good and bad pleasures, he has yet to provide a criterion by means of which he distinguishes between shameful and noble lives and good and bad pleasures. One option would, of course, be to say that good pleasures are those which are proper to a noble life, where the noble life would be one based on the exercise of the virtues; but he has rendered this position unavailable to himself by suggesting that the virtues are merely means to pleasure (or, more broadly “the good things”), and not independently good in

their own right (491e-492c). As it stands, his position appears to be circular, with the virtues justified by reference to pleasure, and pleasure justified by reference to virtue. Only a more coherent vision of human happiness, one which renders explicit the places of virtue and pleasure in overall human well-being, could clarify this. Callicles is unclear about the nature of the human good, and, hence, his critique of justice—that it is bad for good people and good for bad people—lacks a coherent foundation. To put this last consequence in its most pointed formulation, *Callicles has failed to resolve Polus' problem*: the noble (virtue) and the beneficial have not been successfully equated or necessarily related.⁹⁹

Whatever the weaknesses of Callicles' position, Socrates' refutation of hedonism is not sufficient to prove his own case. He has yet to prove that *nomos* aims at the true well-being of each person's soul or how, in particular, legally prescribed or prohibited acts contribute to or detract from that well-being; hence, he has yet to prove that justice is noble and beneficial, that injustice or “having more” is shameful and harmful, that it is always worse to do than to suffer injustice, or that the unjust are benefited by punishment. Socrates has not directly confronted Callicles' critique of *nomos*, even if he has dismantled Callicles' alternative.

The most important result of the refutation of hedonism, as I have said, is that it allows Socrates to reintroduce his distinction between art and flattery (500a-501c, 463a-465d). Even this, however, is not a necessary consequence of the refutation of hedonism.

⁹⁹ This failure is most apparent from the fact that Callicles, at this point, would not be able to answer decisively one way or another whether it is better to be a base person who enjoys “good things” or a noble person deprived of them. In practice, as we shall see, he chooses the former.

Rather, it is a consequence of Callicles' admission that he does indeed distinguish between good and bad pleasures, coupled with an irritated obligingness that moves him to assent to Socrates' proposals in order to get the conversation over with. We have already seen, though, that the deeper truth behind this admission and obligingness is that Callicles lacks a clear criterion for distinguishing between good and bad pleasures. That said, Callicles' admission of the distinction between good and bad pleasures proves to be the turning point of the whole conversation with Socrates. After this point, he never attempts to defend, he never even mentions, his account of natural justice again. His critique of justice is dropped. Socrates is able, without resistance on Callicles' part, to put forward an account of virtue and happiness that formally refutes Callicles' own position (especially its apparent premise that intemperance is better than moderation).

To return to the dialogue, Callicles grants to Socrates that "the end of all actions is the good" (499e), and that one must therefore pursue the useful or beneficial pleasures and pains and eschew the harmful pleasures and pains (499c-e). Consequently, "One must...do both other things and pleasant things for the sake of good things, but not good ones for the sake of pleasant" (500a).¹⁰⁰ Callicles further grants to Socrates that one must be "an artful man" (*technikou*, an expert) to distinguish between useful and harmful pleasures; not just anyone is qualified to distinguish them (500a). This admission on Callicles' part is puzzling. As we have seen, there has been no suggestion up to this point that any special knowledge is needed in order to discern the good things. Callicles has

¹⁰⁰ Note that Callicles grants not only that the end of every action is the good, but *ought* to be the good. The force of this distinction lies in the fact that Callicles has now admitted (implicitly) that people make mistakes in their pursuit of the good when they take their orientation by pleasure. So now Socrates' thesis has the force of a condemnation of hedonism, whereas, in conversation with Polus, it served merely to mark the distinction between the ends and means of action.

presented the same obvious candidates that Gorgias and Polus also had in mind: pleasure, power, wealth, honor, status, and so forth. There seem to be two, not necessarily mutually exclusive, accounts for why Callicles says here that one must be an “expert” to discern them. He could simply be “gratifying” Gorgias by offering to Socrates the answer that he thinks Socrates wants, all to bring the conversation more quickly to a close. Alternatively, he could be implicitly admitting that he himself stands in need of enlightenment of this score and thus is not himself the “expert” he thought he was.

Socrates uses Callicles’ admission of the need for an “expert” with regard to pleasures as an opportunity to reintroduce his classification of true and false arts (500a-501c), where the true arts aim at the good and the false ones aims merely at pleasure. Callicles makes it clear that he does not truly assent to Socrates’ conclusions but is merely doing so verbally in order to bring the conversation to a conclusion in accordance with Gorgias’ wishes (see 501c). After establishing that there are certain practices aimed at gratifying groups of people (for example, tragedy; 501c-502d), Socrates introduces the topic of political rhetoric, “the rhetoric directed toward the Athenian people and the other peoples of free men in the cities” (502d-e), and he asks Callicles,

Do the rhetors in your opinion always speak with a view to the best, aiming at this, that because of their speeches the citizens shall be as good as possible? Or do these men too strive for gratifying the citizens and, for the sake of their own private interest, make light of the common interest, and associate with the peoples as if with children, trying only to gratify

them, and giving no heed to whether they will be better or worse because of these things? (502e-503a)

Callicles replies that there is no simple answer to this question. Some rhetors are such as Socrates says, but “there are some who care about the citizens when they say what they say” (503a). Socrates concludes that political rhetoric is therefore twofold, one part of it shameful flattery, the other part “noble,” aiming at all times to say what would make the souls of the citizens as good as possible, whether or not such speeches would be pleasant to hear (503a-b). Socrates then asks Callicles for an example of someone who practices noble rhetoric. Callicles replies that there is none among the current rhetors,¹⁰¹ to which Socrates responds that he himself does not know a single one of the *earlier* politicians who practiced noble rhetoric either (503b). Surprised at this, Callicles says, “What? Do you not hear that Themistocles turned out to be a good man, and Cimon, and Miltiades, and Pericles himself, who recently came to his end, whom you too have heard” (503c)?

This response is telling. All along we have seen a tension within Callicles’ position between, one might say, an envy of tyrants, on the one hand, and an aspiration to be a noble, good, and well-reputed citizen, on the other (see 484c-d, 486c-d, and 491a-d). Here we see four examples of men who, to Callicles’ mind, genuinely served the common good of Athens and also (or consequently) proved themselves noble and good and won for themselves good reputations. It might be said that Callicles is merely offering these men as counterexamples to Socrates’ assertion, but that he harbors no

¹⁰¹ Although it is impossible to establish a “dramatic date” for this dialogue (see Dodds, 1959, pp. 17-18), the references to the recent passing of Pericles, as well as to Alcibiades being at the start of his career, suggest that we should take Callicles to have rhetors such as Cleon in mind here—the “demagogues” decried by the more oligarchically-leaning citizens, among whom was Andron son of Androtion, member of the Four Hundred and friend of Callicles (487c; see Dodds 1959, p. 282).

special admiration for them, and, thus, that this statement on his part is not in tension with his envy for tyrants who subordinate the common good to their own private good. This response is inadequate, however. First, as I have just noted, this estimation of the Four (as I will call them) does not come “out of the blue.” These men conform as well as any could to the aspirations Callicles expressed in the second half of his first speech to Socrates (484c-486d). That does not mean, of course, that Callicles does not *also* envy tyrants; it establishes merely that Callicles possesses partially conflicting aspirations. Even stronger evidence that Callicles genuinely admires these four men is that, later on (515d, 517a-b) he will openly say so, asserting that no other politicians have accomplished such great things for Athens. Insofar as Callicles, in his own political practice (see 481d-e), is evidently not aspiring to tyranny, it stands to reason that these four are “role models” for him.¹⁰² He admires them and aspires to be like them—though Socrates’ description of Callicles’ activity of course reveals that he is not nearly as talented as they were.

Socrates denies, however, that the Four were practitioners of noble rhetoric. He says that they were good men only if Callicles is correct to say that “true virtue” lies in “satisfying both one’s own and others’ desires” (503c; cf. 491e-492c). They were not practitioners of noble rhetoric, however, if Socrates is right that its practice consists in “fulfill[ing] those desires that, when sated, make a human being better, but not those that make him worse” (503c-d). He proposes that they investigate further.

¹⁰² Given that they all played important roles in the augmentation of Athenian might and empire, which is “naturally just,” according to Callicles, these men do present a kind of bridge between the radical and the respectable poles of Callicles’ position. Nonetheless, the Four did *not* serve exclusively their own interests, as natural justice would seem to counsel.

He starts by describing what a person “who speaks with a view to the best” would do. He gets Callicles’ (insincere) assent (see 504a) that, like any other craftsman, such a person would aim at producing a certain form or order or arrangement within his subject matter, and that good or useful products of each art are precisely those that possess their own proper arrangements, whether this is some external product, or the body, or the soul (503e-504b).¹⁰³ Socrates then turns to the human body in particular. What comes into being in a human body when it is properly ordered and arranged? Guessing correctly at Socrates’ intent, Callicles answers, “You probably mean health and strength” (504b). That is, a properly ordered body comes to have bodily virtue (see 504c). Socrates then asks, in effect, what the virtues of the soul are. What comes to be in a properly ordered soul? Callicles, who is wholly disengaged at this point, tells Socrates to answer himself. Obliging, Socrates says that the proper orderings and arrangements of the soul are “the lawful” (*nomimon*) and “law” (*nomos*), which make souls “lawful” (*nomimoi*) and “orderly” (*kosmioi*), and which are called justice and moderation (504d).¹⁰⁴ In other words, the virtues of the soul are justice and moderation, and properly ordered souls are just and moderate. To this Callicles responds merely, “Let it be” (504d). Hence, the aim of the rhetor who practices noble rhetoric will always be to produce justice and moderation in the souls of the citizens, even if doing so is not pleasant for them (504d-e). Further, just as doctors allow healthy people to satisfy their desires, but not sick people, just so a true rhetor will not allow “thoughtless, intemperate, unjust, and impious” people

¹⁰³ Callicles expresses skepticism at the notion that the analogy can be properly applied to the soul (at 504b), but goes along with the argument anyway.

¹⁰⁴ This characterization of moderation and justice makes them very hard to distinguish. To be lawful is to be law-abiding or to be (or act) according to law, in which case to be just would mean to abide by moderation or to be (or act) in accordance with moderation. But that is also what it means to be moderate.

to indulge all their desires, but only those that will make them better (504e-505b). But, since denying a soul the satisfaction of its desires is “punishing” (or “chastening,” *kolazein*) it, it turns out that “Being punished...is better for the soul than intemperance” (505b). Socrates has refuted Callicles once more.

All of this proves too much for Callicles. Despite his willingness to go along with the argument for Gorgias’ sake, at this point he attempts once again to remove himself (505c-505d). Socrates tries unsuccessfully to get him to continue, chiding him for being unwilling to suffer the beneficial punishment of being refuted (505c). He then tries unsuccessfully to get a volunteer to continue in Callicles’ stead. Callicles suggests that Socrates finish the argument by asking and answering himself (505d), and, with Gorgias’ urging (506a-b), Socrates agrees to do so. He then goes on to complete his formal refutation of Callicles (506c-508c). Using the analogy between goodness and orderliness and between orderliness and moderation, he argues that the moderate soul (not the intemperate one) is good because it is orderly (506c-507a). He then argues that the moderate soul is the completely virtuous soul (moderate, just, pious, and courageous), and which, consequently, does well (*eu prattein*) and is happy, while the intemperate soul is bad, vicious, and unhappy (507a-c). Having established these points, Socrates concludes that he has thereby proven all of the contentions which he had made to Gorgias and Polus and which Callicles had claimed that they granted only out of shame (507d-508c). To be happy, one must be moderate. One must see to it never to be in need of punishment (or chastening), but, if so, one must seek out punishment in order to become better. The same holds regarding one’s care for one’s own (be it friends, family, or city).

In all cases, one must practice moderation or, if one fails, one must submit to chastening (or punishment) in order to restore it. Justice and moderation, not “having more,” lead to happiness. Hence one must use rhetoric to accuse oneself and one’s own (if this becomes necessary), and doing injustice is worse and more shameful than suffering it, and the true rhetor must know the just in order to practice rhetoric.¹⁰⁵

This argument is, of course, utterly unconvincing to Callicles. Nor, I think, should he be persuaded, since the whole argument rests primarily on analogies and stipulated definitions. Socrates introduces moderation through the notion of “order,” but never says what moderation is. Is this “order” the same as the order that comes from ruling one’s desires (the ordinary meaning of “moderation”)? He does not say, though it clearly must be more than that, since Socrates introduces it as the fundamental principle of the order of the soul, implying all the other virtues. Socrates previously implied that one ought to control one’s desires for the sake of maintaining the good order of the soul (see 504d, 506c-507a); in that case, that same exercise of control cannot itself also be the order for the sake of which it is exercised. A further difficulty results from the fact that, in the process of the argument, Socrates puts forth a definition of justice as doing what is “fitting” (*prosēkonta*, 507b) with respect to human beings. He neither explains this definition—in particular, how it relates to the kind of justice that *nomos* commands and that Callicles had spoken of, nor does he defend it. This is especially puzzling since

¹⁰⁵ It is here that Socrates’ attributes Callicles’ errors to his neglect of “geometry” (507e-508a). That is, Callicles believes that “having more” is good because he neglects to perceive that all the elements of the ordered whole (heaven, earth, gods, and men) are bound together proper proportions (“geometrical equality”) and, hence, friendship and community. This is a puzzling image wherein justice and moderation (whatever they may be) take on literally cosmic proportions, in which the order of the soul (a part) and the order of the universe (the whole) become images of one another. Callicles never says anything about this image.

Socrates presents justice as an effect (as it were) of having a properly ordered soul, which would seem to suggest that the basis of just behavior lies in concern for *one's own* good rather than another's; but it is unclear how or why a person with a well-ordered soul should care for others. "Fitting" behavior, both in itself and in relation to the commands of the law, is left unspecified. This result is further made possible by the fact that Socrates identifies *nomos* not with the *nomoi* (which is what Callicles was talking about), but rather with the good order of the soul itself. As a result, the relation of the *nomoi* to the good order of the soul is also left unspecified. In a sense, Socrates and Callicles are talking about entirely different things.

The rehabilitation of justice passes by without comment or defense, almost as a footnote to the rehabilitation of moderation.¹⁰⁶ Because Socrates is able to assert without challenge that justice is a necessary consequence of moderation, and that injustice is a necessary sign of immoderation, he is able to reassert his claim that doing injustice is worse than suffering it. Further, because of the elasticity of the verb *kolazein* (to chasten, to punish), he is allowed once again seemingly to vindicate the actual practices of legal punishment as necessary to reintroducing virtue into the soul. In the course of none of this does Callicles break in to protest, evidently being more concerned with getting the conversation over with than with disputing Socrates' position. This renders the refutation highly unpersuasive. At most, Socrates has shown what a true defense of justice as a virtue would have to look like, and what kind of standard the laws would have to meet in

¹⁰⁶ As had the rehabilitation of *nomos* previously; see 504d.

order to claim truly to promote virtue and well-being. Implicitly, Socrates has denied that the actual laws do so or that justice, as it is ordinarily understood, is a true virtue.

4.2. The Consequences (508c-527e)

Having “refuted” Callicles’ account of justice and moderation, Socrates next considers the reproach that Callicles had directed toward him earlier—namely, that Socrates is unable to protect himself or those he cares for from the greatest dangers, and that he is, consequently, in the most shameful condition a person can be in (508c-d; cf. 486a-c). Socrates first discusses the topic of power and how to protect oneself from the “greatest dangers” (509b-513d).¹⁰⁷ After this, he proves both that Callicles is not qualified to go into public affairs (513d-515b), and that none of the Four practiced the true political art (515c-521a). Socrates then makes the surprising claim that he himself is one of the only Athenians, if not the only one, to practice the “true politics,” and that it is for this reason that he is subject to the dangers for which Callicles had reproached him (521a-522e). Nonetheless, Socrates argues once more that he is not thereby liable to the “greatest dangers,” since the greatest evil is not to suffer injustice but to do it. To prove this one last time, he tells a story about the rewards and punishments awaiting just and unjust souls in the underworld (522e-527e). In this section two important aspects of Callicles’ position emerge. First, his deepest (or strongest) motivation is the desire to avoid suffering injustice. This desire is even stronger than his attachment to virtue or nobility. Second, and related, Callicles proves, in his positive desires or in his conception

¹⁰⁷ Note that, although Socrates has implicitly redefined what it means to do or suffer injustice, he now returns (at 508d-e) to their ordinary meanings, thus emphasizing how questionable his account has been.

of the good, to be no different from the many that he claims to despise. Both of these facts serve to explain why Callicles has been unable to conceive of a non-circular understanding of the relationship between virtue and happiness.

Callicles briefly becomes reengaged in the conversation when Socrates turns to the question of what kind of power a person must have in order to avoid suffering injustice (510a-511a). This is unsurprising since Socrates here finally steps away from his previous abstractions and addresses himself once again to concrete issues of concern for Callicles. Callicles agrees with Socrates that both doing and suffering injustice are evils, and that the shamefulness of one's condition is proportionate to the evils against which one cannot defend oneself (509b-c).¹⁰⁸ It is evident that one cannot protect oneself from suffering injustice merely by wishing not to suffer it; one must have some kind of power (509d-510a). Callicles grants to Socrates that the same holds for avoiding doing injustice as well. As for avoiding suffering injustice, Socrates proposes the following course of action: "one must either rule in the city oneself—or even rule as tyrant—or else be a comrade to the existing regime" (510a). That is, to protect oneself, one must either be strongest person in the city or a friend of the strongest person (or group). Callicles enthusiastically agrees with this, calling the answer "altogether fine" (510a-b).¹⁰⁹ Socrates then proves, in accordance with the old proverb, "like to like," that, in order to be as much a friend to another as possible, one must be as like as possible to that

¹⁰⁸ This principle does not necessarily reduce the noble (virtue) to a mere means to the good (good things or protection from evils), if virtue is itself a supreme constituent of well-being (as Socrates has argued).

¹⁰⁹ He also says that this is evidence that he is "ready...to praise" Socrates whenever he says something "fine" (or noble). In other words, he all but says that his prior disengagement is the result of his belief that Socrates is talking evident nonsense.

other in one's own character, rejoicing in what the other rejoices in, and being pained by what the other is pained by (510b-e). In the case of a "savage and uneducated tyrant," for example, if one is too much better than the tyrant, one will be feared, not trusted; but if one is even worse than the tyrant, one will be despised (510b-c). The tyrant (or ruler) will befriend "only that man who, being of the same character and praising and blaming the same things, is willing to be ruled and to be submissive in the city" (510c-d). Such a person, befriended by the tyrant, will have "great power," and will not suffer injustice with impunity. With Callicles' agreement, Socrates concludes: "Then if some one of the young in that city thought, 'In what way might I have great power, and no one might do me an injustice?' this, it would seem, is the path for him: immediately from youth to accustom himself to rejoice and to be distressed at the same things as the master, and to make preparations so as to be as much as possible like that man" (510d). Callicles agrees completely.¹¹⁰

Socrates then points out that such a course of action would not be sufficient to protect oneself against *doing* injustice. Liking oneself to an unjust ruler, one would necessarily render oneself more unjust, and, having great power, one would be able to do injustice and get away with it without paying a penalty. Consequently, imitation of an unjust ruler, while protecting one against suffering injustice, will cause one to do injustice and thus, according to Socrates, to fall prey to the greatest of evils (510e-511a). Callicles protests Socrates' reintroduction of this nonsense: "I don't know how you twist

¹¹⁰ Buzzetti (2005, pp. 41-43) has persuasively argued that the "youth" Socrates has in mind here is none other than Callicles himself, and that the "savage and uneducated tyrant" is the Athenian *dēmos* that Socrates had earlier portrayed Callicles flattering (see 481d-e). We will return to this point shortly.

the arguments up and down each time, Socrates. Or don't you know that this man who imitates will kill that one, who does not imitate, if he wishes, and confiscate his property" (511a)? This objection implies, yet again, that suffering injustice is much worse than doing it—or, alternatively, that "baseness of soul" (as Socrates understands it) is not the greatest of evils. Socrates responds that he knows this well, having heard it many times, from Polus and Callicles and almost everyone else; but he adds that this person "will kill [him], if he wishes, but it will be a base man (*ponēros*) killing a noble and good one (*kalon kagathon*)" (511b).

In response to this assertion, Callicles makes a revealing outburst: "Isn't this exactly the infuriating thing (*to aganaktēton*)" (511b)?¹¹¹ Socrates denies that anyone who "has intelligence" (*noun...echonti*) would be infuriated by this (implying, of course, that Callicles does not have intelligence). He asks Callicles whether "a human being ought to make preparations for living as long a time as possible and to practice those arts that always save us from dangers," such as rhetoric (511b-c). Still impassioned (or exasperated), Callicles tells Socrates that a person should indeed practice such arts, and that he is counseling Socrates correctly (511c). I will return to the significance of this shortly. Suffice it to say for now that it contradicts the implication of Callicles' first speech, where it was presented as impossible for a "real man" to be harmed by a base one.

¹¹¹ This is Nichols' translation. As I said above, Buzzetti (2005, p. 42, n. 22) has persuasively established that the meaning of *aganaktēton* here is "what makes one indignant." I have retained Nichols' translation here because it sounds more forceful than, "Isn't that exactly what makes you indignant?" One should remember, however, that Callicles is referring here to the fury of indignation.

Socrates responds by delivering an extended speech on the arts of lifesaving (as we might call them). Socrates points out that swimming saves lives, but is not considered admirable because of this. Likewise, ship captains save the lives of their passengers, and also their families and possessions, yet they charge modest fees and do not consider themselves lofty and great human beings (511c-d). Socrates argues that this modesty results from the captain's awareness that he does not know whether he has truly benefited those passengers whose lives he has saved. Perhaps among his passengers were some for whom it would have been better if they had drowned—someone with a “great and incurable [sickness] of the body” or of the soul (512a-b). The captain (according to Socrates) “knows that it is not better for the degenerate human being to live, for he must necessarily live badly” (512b). Socrates adds that the same things hold for engineers, since they are modest, yet sometimes they save whole cities by their devices. Socrates says that, even though Callicles despises pilots and engineers, and admires rhetors, he has no good reason to do so. Both engineers and rhetors practice the art of saving lives, and that is precisely (according to Socrates) what Callicles has praised rhetors for. Consequently, he asks Callicles, “on the basis of the things for which you praise your own affairs, by what just argument do you despise the engineer and the others of whom I was speaking just now” (512c-d)? He dismisses what he thinks Callicles might offer as a reason: his own superior virtue and his aristocratic lineage. That depends, Socrates implies, on what virtue really is.

Socrates claims that Callicles understands virtue to consist in “saving oneself and one’s own property—of whatever sort one happens to be” (512d).¹¹² If this is true, Callicles’ blame of engineers and other artisans is rendered “ridiculous,” because self-contradictory. He asks Callicles to reconsider his course of life.

[Y]ou blessed man, see if the noble (*gennaion*) and the good are not something other than saving and being saved. For the true man (*alēthōs andra*), at any rate, must reject living any amount of time whatsoever, and must not be a lover of life. Rather, turning over what concerns these things to the god and believing the women’s saying that no man may escape his destiny, he must investigate what comes after this: In what way may he who is going to live for a time live best? (512d-e)

He asks Callicles whether the best life is really one of becoming a friend of the Athenian people, and becoming as much like them as possible, in order to have great power and not suffer injustice. Considering himself and Callicles together, he suggests, to the contrary, that “our choice of this power in the city will be at the cost of the things dearest to us” (513a). As we might expect by this point, he does not say explicitly what these “dearest” things are. He admonishes Callicles that it is impossible to have great power in Athens without becoming like the Athenian regime: “...you must be not an imitator but like these men in your very own nature, if you are to achieve something genuine in friendship with the Athenian people” (513b). Anyone who tells him otherwise is lying. Callicles

¹¹² Earlier (503c) Socrates had claimed that Callicles considers virtue to be “satisfying both one’s own and others’ desires.” This latter definition reflects Callicles’ speech praising immoderation (491e-492c). The definition offered above (virtue as self-preservation) is similarly suited to this context.

must become like the *dēmos* in his nature if he wants to acquire the political and rhetorical skills he wishes for.

Callicles' response is telling: "In some way, I don't know what, what you say seems good to me, Socrates; but I suffer the experience of the many—I am not altogether persuaded by you" (513c). Socrates tells Callicles that he is unpersuaded because the "love of the people" (cf. 481d-e) in his soul opposes Socrates' arguments, but that he would perhaps be persuaded if they discussed the matter "often and better" (513c).

This sequence is very important for understanding Callicles' character because it reveals his deepest motives and concerns. We have remarked more than once that Callicles' outspokenness about justice does not seem to harmonize with his behavior as a politician. In conversation with Socrates, he is nothing but contemptuous of the multitude, while, in the assembly, he flatters it and strives always to be in agreement with it. In his behavior in the assembly, Callicles resembles the youth Socrates has just spoken of (at 510d), who becomes like his ruler in order to avoid suffering injustice. Buzzetti (2005, pp. 41-42) is surely right to conclude that, when speaking of this youth, Socrates has Callicles in mind. That being the case, Callicles' motives for acting this way become clear. He is afraid of suffering injustice.¹¹³ He goes into politics, and practices it as he does, in order to gain the power he thinks is necessary to ensure his own security.

This fact does not resolve the contradiction between his speeches and his deeds, however. In fact, it heightens that contradiction. We now see a Callicles who, in his own

¹¹³ This is a central thesis of Buzzetti 2005.

affairs, appears to be motivated primarily by self-preservation, but who, in his speeches, extols as naturally noble and virtuous the courageous man. Socrates' questioning here makes this tension between manliness and security explicit. By doing so, Socrates reveals another and more intimate way in which Callicles has failed to bring together the noble and the beneficial. Not only has Callicles failed to prove that the noble and the beneficial coincide (in the sense that the good of the stronger is identical to the noble), but he has revealed himself to pursue the beneficial (security) at the expense of the noble (courage in the face of the many) in his own political life. Callicles' account of natural justice to some extent has obscured this tension by its suggestion that it is always noble for the stronger to seek their own security, but Callicles does not fully believe this. We can be sure that he does not fully believe this because Socrates' speech partly gets through to him; it "seems good," even though he is not fully persuaded. The fact that he is ultimately not persuaded establishes that Callicles' anxiety over his own security is stronger in him than his attachment to his idea of nobility.¹¹⁴ To repeat, in speech and in deed he has failed to bring together the noble and the beneficial, but does not want to admit this to himself.

Callicles' confusion is heightened by his indignation over the fate of the "noble and good" at the hands of the base—an indignation revealed by his outburst at 511b. Fear and indignation are thus working together to move him away from a steady devotion

¹¹⁴ It should be noted that I am not suggesting that Callicles *ought* to be persuaded by Socrates' remarks. Socrates may very well be exaggerating (for his own purposes) the extent to which he is indifferent to his own personal safety. Whether Socrates is exaggerating is a separate question from the one that we are considering, as is the question whether Callicles ought to be persuaded. I am here examining fact that Callicles is indeed moved by what Socrates says. It "seems good" to part of him, but another part of him is unpersuaded. I am drawing out the consequences of this internal conflict.

to nobility towards the pursuit of mere self-preservation (at least partly through the learning of rhetoric in order to save himself in the law courts from judicial murder or expropriation at the hands of the collectively mightier many).¹¹⁵ Otherwise put, Callicles' anxiety over the fate of the noble has paradoxically moved him to place self-preservation above the pursuit of virtue. Socrates, in his speech about the lifesaving arts, has called this to Callicles' attention, but Callicles has failed fully to acknowledge it—at least partly because he evidently cannot conceive of the goodness of virtue in a manner concrete enough to reveal to him how it could be worth risking “the greatest dangers” in order to hew to it. Socrates has not made this easy for Callicles, both because he has presented an obscure vision of virtue and because he has (in one might almost call a rhetorical manner) tried to make pursuit of virtue and concern for self-preservation appear as mutually exclusive as possible.

Rather than building on the slight common ground that his last argument has managed to establish between Callicles and himself, Socrates proceeds in his next argument (513d-515b) to alienate Callicles almost completely. If the previous argument had suggested to Callicles that he is a coward, the next argument asserts openly that Callicles is not qualified to go into politics (or, more precisely, to have gone into politics). Socrates procedure, rather than moving Callicles to reconsider his path, merely confirms for him his long-standing suspicion (see 482c-483a, 489b-c, 497b) that Socrates is merely “a lover of victory” in arguments (515b).

¹¹⁵ This is one of Buzzetti 2005's core claims.

Having reawakened (for obscure reasons) Callicles' hostility, he goes on to slander, in the form of argument, the four men that Callicles had held up as practitioners of noble rhetoric, serving the common interest of the city: Miltiades, Themistocles, Cimon, and Pericles (515b-517a; cf. 503c). He spends the bulk of his argument (515d-516d) on Pericles. Selectively distorting the historical record,¹¹⁶ Socrates argues that, in each case, the hostility manifested against them at the end of their careers by the people they governed, seen in light of the lack of hostility manifested against them at the beginning of their careers, shows that these leaders made the people they governed "more savage...more unjust and worse" (516c). The true work of the political leader, however, is to make the citizens as good as possible (see 515c). Therefore, none of these four was a "good citizen." Hence, Socrates concludes that it appears that there has never yet been a true politician in Athens, since Callicles admits himself that there is none at present (516d-517a).¹¹⁷

Callicles delivers a telling protest against this conclusion: "But it is nevertheless far from being the case, Socrates, that anyone of those today has ever accomplished such works as anyone you wish of these men has accomplished" (517a-b). Socrates agrees with Callicles to the extent that these four were indeed great "servants" of the city. They were "more skilled in service than those of today, at any rate, and more capable of

¹¹⁶ See Dodds 1959 (pp. 356-60) and Stauffer 2006 (pp. 152-54 and 153 n. 33). Socrates' reasons for arguing this way are obscure to me, but knowledge of them is not, I think, necessary for grasping Callicles' critique and character.

¹¹⁷ The argument from 519b-521a complements this one, but I will not discuss it. Only one revealing detail emerges from it: Callicles' contempt for the sophists (520a). This is not an atypical response from a young aristocrat; cf. *Protagoras* 312a. See Dodds 1959 (p. 367) for one conjecture on the source of this attitude. For us, we need only remark that this once again shows Callicles to be essentially a man of action, not an "intellectual," and, in conjunction with this, to be a person convinced that he already knows everything he needs about how to live and what virtues it requires and how to get them.

supplying the city with the things it desired” (517b). He denies, however, that this made them good citizens, since, again, “the one work of the good citizen” (517c) is to lead the desires, through persuasion and force, in the direction that will make the souls of the citizens as good as possible. The Four, however, did not do this, but merely served the desires the people happened to have had.¹¹⁸ (That is, they made Athens into a rich and powerful imperial metropolis.) Socrates likens the Four to men who feasted the city’s desires until the city became big, fat, and inwardly sick. Because the city did not become outwardly sick under their rule, however, the people praise these leaders as benefactors. Socrates predicts, however, that, when this sickness manifests itself, and the city begins to waste away, the people will blame their present leaders, but not their former leaders (such as the Four), even though the latter were the ones who set the city on its self-destructive course by serving the untutored desires of the multitude (518c-519b).

As I have already said, Callicles reveals a genuine admiration for these statesmen in this exchange. This supports the hypothesis that men such as Pericles, rather than Archelaus, are the real models that Callicles emulates. One might wonder why Callicles would admire men who served a “common interest” that he seemed earlier to deny the very existence of. As Socrates quickly shows (517c, 518e-519a), Callicles admires them because they augmented the power of Athens and its empire, thereby bringing glory to themselves. Even if they did not tyrannically serve their own “great desires,” they *did*

¹¹⁸ This is an important admission on Socrates’ part, since he implicitly admits that Callicles is correct about the character of the many. The empire-builders fed but did not originate the many’s desire for empire with its glories and riches. The desire originated in the people, who thus really do think that “having more” is a good thing, even if they condemn it among themselves. This admission is, then, parallel to Socrates’ admission to Polus that “almost everybody” would agree with the latter about the benefits of tyrannical rule.

serve the great desires of Athens and the Athenian *demos*. The activities of the Athenian empire, in a sense, provide a model both for Callicles' conception of natural justice (since Athens considered itself justified in taking what it did), and his conception of virtue as "support" for the satisfaction of great desires. Callicles is, therefore, very much like the many he claims to despise in his conception of virtue. This may serve to explain yet another sense in which he is a "lover of the people": not only does he need the *demos* to get what he wants (security, prestige, wealth), but he, in fact, wants the very same things that the *demos* wants. He is like the many not only because he wishes to avoid suffering injustice but because he shares their conception of the good—including its confused notion of virtue.

After a short interlude (519b-521a), Socrates asks Callicles once more what kind of "caring for the city" he is advocating: the kind that Socrates has defended, where the politician strives to make the city as good as possible, even "fighting" with the populace when the beneficial course runs counter to its desires; or, on the contrary, the kind Callicles had (it seems) proposed before, which concerns itself with gratifying the citizenry by serving its desires. Socrates exhorts Callicles to answer frankly, as he had at the beginning (521a). Callicles answers, "Well then, I say as one who will serve" (521a). When Socrates repeats that that course of action is "flattery" (*kolakeia*), Callicles retorts, in effect, that Socrates can call it whatever demeaning name he wants, but that this course is nonetheless the better course because of the disastrous consequences of the alternative (521a-b). Before he can name these consequences, Socrates interrupts him, saying that Callicles has named them many times. Callicles need not repeat that Socrates will,

following his course, be killed by whoever wishes to kill him, so that Socrates need not repeat that “it will be a base man killing a good one” (521b). He adds that Callicles need not mention that Socrates will be expropriated, so that Socrates need not repeat that the unjust man will use unjustly and badly the possessions he has unjustly acquired (521b-c; cf. 513e-514a).

Callicles still is neither moved nor convinced by this argument. Nor, apparently, does he think that Socrates himself believes what he is saying. The evil of suffering injustice is still too palpable for him; the evil of doing it, abstract and elusive. He can only explain Socrates’ speeches and deeds by attributing to Socrates the belief that he will never be dragged into a law court and suffer injustice, and to believe that he enjoys this security on account of his secluded life, “dwell[ing] out of the way” (521c). That is, according to Callicles, Socrates believes that he will never be singled out and done injustice “by a human being who is perhaps altogether degenerate and lowly” (521c), because he minds his own business and does not get mixed up in public affairs; not calling attention to himself, no will one will target him. This shows, of course, that Callicles is not only unpersuaded, but still considers Socrates’ position so manifestly bad that *Socrates himself* could not possibly really believe it. Thus, though Socrates has disparaged the “great works” that would seem to be Callicles’ positive aspirations, Callicles holds to his conception of the “greatest dangers.”

Socrates disagrees completely with Callicles conjecture, saying that “in this city anyone may suffer anything that might happen” (521c).¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, he says, if

¹¹⁹ Socrates thereby seems to confirm once more Callicles’ estimation of the many.

someone were to drag him into court, he would not know what to say in his own defense and that “it would be nothing strange if [he] should die” (521c-d). He explains, seemingly paradoxically, that he would suffer this fate precisely because he is one of the few, if not the only, of the Athenians who practices “the true political art” (521d).¹²⁰ That is, he speaks to every citizen with a view to benefiting that citizen’s soul, without respect for what that person finds pleasant to hear. Hence, if he were tried, it would be as though he were a doctor being tried by a pastry cook in front of children (521e). Accused of causing pain to the citizens (that is, refuting them), he could not convince a jury that he inflicted this pain for their own good, and could point to no flattering “benefactions” in his own defense. Hence, he would “be at a total loss as to what he should say” (522a-b).

Still unmoved by Socrates’ arguments, Callicles repeats the same charge he had leveled at Socrates in his opening speech (see 483a-b, 486a-d): “In your opinion, then, Socrates, is a human being in a fine state (*kalōs echein*), when he’s in such a condition in the city, powerless to help himself” (522c)? Socrates’ argument has apparently not changed Callicles’ mind in the slightest. Socrates responds that he is indeed in a fine state, so long as he has neither said nor done anything unjust with respect to men or gods—that is, so long as he has lived in accordance with his own arguments (522c-d). He says that he *would* be “ashamed” and “infuriated” (or indignant) if he lacked the power to avoid doing injustice and died because of this, but that he would “[bear] death easily” if he died because he failed to practice “flattering rhetoric” (522d-e). He adds that “no one fears dying itself, who is not all in all most irrational and unmanly (*anandros*),

¹²⁰ It should be noted that this statement seems clash with the argument he used earlier to prove that the Four were not “good citizens” (see 515d-517a).

but he fears doing injustice” (522e).¹²¹ Unlike before, however, he proves this by telling a myth (or, as he calls it, a “rational account” [*logos*], 523a) about the judgment of souls after death and the rewards for the just and punishments for the unjust (523a-526d). We need not go into the details of this myth.¹²² He then ends the speech (526d-527e) by exhorting Callicles to drop his present way of life and “to live and to die practicing justice and the rest of virtue” (527e), so that he might have “as healthy a soul as possible” (526d), and thus to enjoy the best life he is capable of. With this exhortation the dialogue ends. Callicles, we are left to assume, remains unpersuaded.

5. Conclusion

The whole thrust of Callicles’ articulated position could be summarized as follows. Conventional justice (and *nomos*) is ignoble, bad, and unjust because it benefits base and worthless people at the expense of good and noble people. What is truly just is for the good and noble to benefit themselves at the expense of the base and worthless. A person is entitled to only so much happiness as his own virtue can secure for him—and no more. The better people, virtuous people, deserve to be happy. (This is the thrust of the first speech.) The noble and good people are those who possess prudence with regard to political affairs and courage enough to accomplish their designs. (This is the thrust of the elaboration.) It is best and just for the better to rule and have more than the worse because happiness consists in enjoying the good things in life to the extent of one’s

¹²¹ Cf. Callicles’ own disparagement of unmanliness at 492b, and in his opening speech at 483a-b.

¹²² The most interesting aspect of the myth is that it seems to replace the intrinsic harm of being unjust (bad order of the soul) with the extrinsic harm of punishment in the afterlife. This myth, therefore, conforms more to ordinary beliefs about justice than to the account of justice explicitly argued for during his formal refutation of Callicles’ position (see 506c-507d).

capacity, and the good and noble have the greatest capacity to seize, secure, and enjoy the good things. (This is the thrust of his second speech, the one in praise of intemperance.)¹²³

The core weakness of Callicles' account, as it came to light under Socrates' cross-examination, can be described in two ways. He does not know, he cannot decide, whether virtue is merely a means to some further end, where this further end constitutes the substance of happiness and human well-being, or whether virtue is itself a constituent part of happiness itself. More simply put, Callicles does not know what the human good is. Hence, because he does not know what the human good is, he does not know what the "stronger" by nature deserve, or even what truly makes the stronger "stronger." As a result, he cannot be moved from his belief that suffering bodily and material harm (and perhaps dishonor) at the hands of others is the greatest of evils a person can suffer. Consequently, he cannot believe, he can barely entertain the idea, that baseness of soul (lack of virtue, vice) is in fact the greatest evil of all, although he clearly believes that being a base human being is a more shameful state than being a noble and good human being who suffers harm.

Despite Callicles' failure to articulate a positive conception of virtue and the human good, it cannot be said that Socrates has truly succeeded in articulating his own.

¹²³ Alongside these aspects of Callicles' position, we have seen other aspects of it (expressed in word or deed) that do not completely harmonize with it. For one thing, although Callicles praises "natural born leaders" and exhorts Socrates to become one himself (insofar as he is able), we see that Callicles himself is anything but a leader in his own political activity. Further, despite his praise of manliness (or courage), we have seen that Callicles himself is largely driven by a fear of suffering injustice. Indeed, this fear explains why he does not risk contradicting the Assembly. Also, the fact that he does defer to the Assembly reveals that his fear of suffering injustice is stronger than desire to become noble and good. His speech to Socrates, however, shows that he actively refuses to admit this to himself.

He has certainly confounded Callicles, but his own position remains obscure. In fact, he has spoken directly in violation of his own expressed principle (see 448e, 462c-d, 463c), by talking at length about what the good condition of the soul, justice, moderation, law, and punishment are *like* without saying precisely what they *are*. But it is not possible to prove that those things are good until one knows what they are. Thus, even if Socrates' account could be vindicated if it were rendered clearer and argued for correctly, it remains the case that, as it stands, it is insufficient.

A further, consequent difficulty with Socrates' position is that it remains questionable that, when he speaks of "justice," "moderation," "law," and "punishment," that he is referring to the phenomena ordinarily understood by these terms—the phenomena whose value Polus had questioned and Callicles had denied. Thus, even if it is true in some sense that it is always worse to do "injustice" than to suffer it, or that only a "moderate" soul is good, Socrates has not proven that this vindicates the practice of moderation or justice as ordinarily conceived. In fact, it could be that Socrates' understandings of these virtues (and hence of "law" and "punishment") are opposed to the ordinary understandings in important respects. If so, Socrates has in fact delivered an implicit *critique* of law, punishment, justice, and moderation as these are normally conceived, since these practices and virtues have been justified as being identical with, or supporting, or necessarily following from the good condition of the soul—which is necessary, Socrates argues, for happiness. It is significant, in light of this, that Socrates seems to concede to Callicles (and to Polus) that the many and their laws *do* neglect the

good order of the soul insofar as they truly believe that happiness lies in “having more” (and only secondarily in being just).

This is not, however, the whole story. Even if Socrates does not literally succeed (or intend to succeed) in vindicating the ordinary conceptions of justice and moderation on their own terms, he quite obviously wishes to *appear* to justify them; hence he moves back and forth between ordinary meanings and more elusive ones. We must ask, then, why Socrates would wish to appear to defend deficient common conceptions, and what this teaches us about the problem of justice.

As we have seen, Callicles’ account ultimately fails because of his confusion over the human good and the relationship between virtue and happiness. The more proximate source of his confusion, I would suggest, lies in the fact that he takes as true the many’s belief that the good or happiness lies in or requires “having more.” He too hastily assumes that this is correct. As a result, he is pushed towards conceiving of virtue as merely instrumental to some other good which constitutes happiness. But he does not fully believe this. He retains a respect for virtue (also, clearly, a result of his education and, thus, in some sense of *nomos* itself) which demands that it be more than a mere means. Thus, the *Gorgias* suggests that Callicles’ approach is incoherent, in the end, because it fails to do justice to the phenomena it is trying to account for. Either he needs a clearer understanding of nature, and a conception of the soul and the human good consistent with it—an understanding that would enable him to refute decisively the claims made on behalf of conventional justice; or else such an account is simply

unavailable and the suggestions that Socrates has made (they are only suggestions) must be followed up to see if there is truth in the claims of moderation and justice to be virtues.

Socrates points to the need for this kind of investigation precisely by offering a *problematic defense* of justice, since the problematic nature of that defense is itself an incentive to further investigation. It is for this reason that Socrates takes care to appear to defend common conceptions of justice and moderation. Perhaps the nature and good of the soul can only begin to be unriddled if one first takes seriously the claims of moderation and justice (and law). Taking seriously the claim that moderation and justice are virtues beneficial to their possessors induces one to consider whether the human good or happiness lies in something other than merely “having more” wealth or honor or power than others. The virtues of moderation and justice—indeed, the very fact that they are taken for virtues and not consistently as mere means—leave room for an exploration of the soul, as well as supply some evidence for how it works, evidence unprejudiced by a summary preliminary dismissal as mere hypocrisy or foolishness. This is not to claim that those ordinary or naïve opinions are correct. After all, they are also the source of the confusion about the good that Calicles has tried but failed to resolve. Hence Socrates’ defense of law and justice is *problematic*.

I remarked above that Socrates’ defense of the goodness of justice is carried out without any attempt on his part to give a rigorous definition of what justice is. It should also be remarked that the conversations with Polus and Calicles were carried out from the start with interlocutors who were denying in one way or another the goodness of

justice. The ordinary belief in the *goodness* of justice does not, therefore, receive exploration in the *Gorgias*. It does in the *Republic*, however, to which we now turn.

Chapter Three:
The Problem of Justice in *Republic*, Book One:
Cephalus and Polemarchus (327a-336a)¹²⁴

This chapter, like chapter one, is primarily meant to set the stage for the subsequent chapter. Just as Gorgias and Polus are of interest largely for how they set up the manner in which Callicles treats the problem of justice, the same thing can be said for Cephalus and Polemarchus with respect to Thrasymachus. The cases are not identical. Briefly put, Gorgias set up Polus by inconsistently recommending both justice and injustice (though his recommendation of injustice was left implicit); Polus, more frank or foolish than Gorgias, tried but failed to establish consistently that injustice was more profitable than justice. He thereby inspired Callicles to attempt a more radical and consistent praise of injustice, which he did by attempting to prove that the true standards of justice and injustice are otherwise than they are commonly taken to be. (As we saw, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles are in agreement about what justice is commonly taken to be.) We have seen the results of his attempt.

The manner in which Cephalus and Polemarchus set the stage for Thrasymachus is different. To a very limited extent, Gorgias and Cephalus are comparable. As we shall see, Cephalus suspects that injustice is often more profitable than justice, though he himself seems to have adhered to the demands of justice throughout his life. In addition, he shares with Gorgias and Polus the same basic understanding of the nature of justice.

¹²⁴ I will be using the Burnet text of the Greek and Bloom's translation. All Stephanus page references in the text are to the *Republic* unless otherwise noted.

The conversation of the *Republic* follows a different path, however. Despite some similar thoughts about justice, Cephalus makes no attempt to praise the profitability of injustice, and so the conversation does not begin with this question. Rather, once the nature of justice has become the focus of the conversation (which coincides almost exactly with Cephalus' departure; see 331c-d), the investigation concerns the *definition* of justice. This investigation is undertaken by Socrates and Polemarchus, Cephalus' son. In searching for a definition of justice, Polemarchus does not question the profitability of justice. Herein lies his particular importance. He is the sole Socratic interlocutor we shall consider who attempts to say what justice is while assuming that justice is a genuine virtue and not merely a burden or a fraud. The conversation turns to the profitability of justice only after Thrasymachus has taken Polemarchus' place (and even then not immediately, see 343c-344c and 347e), and Thrasymachus intervenes precisely because Polemarchus fails to arrive at a definition of justice that preserves its status as a virtue and unqualified good.¹²⁵ To his mind, the attempt to define justice while assuming its goodness leads only to "nonsense" (336b-d).

For our purposes, the primary significance of Cephalus and Polemarchus lies in the fact that they are *not* blamers of justice. They are representatives of respectable opinion to which Gorgias deferred, and they do not defer to it merely out of shame or prudence, the way Gorgias and Polus did. They (and especially Polemarchus) are therefore particularly valuable for seeing the kinds of limitations of or contradictions within the ordinary, decent understanding of justice that can lead, on the one hand, to a

¹²⁵ In different ways, this point is also argued by Nichols 1987 and Stauffer 2001.

Callicles or Thrasymachus rejecting it as a sham virtue, or, on the other, to Socrates' attempt to redefine justice in a manner that escapes those limitations and contradictions.

To anticipate, Cephalus' understanding of justice corresponds implicitly to what Callicles had called "conventional justice": neither harming nor being harmed, and, in particular, respecting others' property. As such, it is a necessary but not directly beneficial quality. In the face of cross-examination, he fails even to articulate adequately his own understanding, showing that he takes for granted what justice is but cannot give an account when needed. Instead, he leaves, prompting Polemarchus to take over his role in the conversation. Polemarchus, in his turn, attempts to incorporate his father's views into a more articulate and comprehensive view of justice seemingly more capable of proving that it is a positively beneficial and admirable quality—that is, a virtue. He in turn fails because he had beliefs about justice that conflict with the definition he has offered. In particular, he believes that the practice of justice must be consistently supportive of human virtue as a whole. (The practice of justice should never be harmful to good human beings.) His definition, however, does not imply this and even (at times) demands the opposite. He is thus left with two options: either justice must be redefined in a manner consistently supportive of human excellence, or he must abandon the belief that justice is consistently supportive of human excellence. He makes feints in the former direction, but Thrasymachus intervenes before he can go any further.

1. Cephalus (327a-331d)

The *Republic*'s discussion of justice begins with the conversation between Socrates and Cephalus.¹²⁶ In the dialogue, Cephalus most directly represents traditional, respectable opinion and authority; he is a wealthy, elderly, pious father who invokes the standard of the decent man (*epieikēs*) and bolsters his opinions with references to esteemed poets and statesmen.¹²⁷ He does not represent the whole of respectable opinion or authority. As a metic and a merchant, he lives an essentially private or economic life. Accordingly, his account of justice is sub-political. He does not refer to questions of the ends, means, and manner of political rule, nor does he mention honor. Nonetheless, he represents an important part of respectable opinion.

The exchange with Cephalus is brief and touches on justice only at the end. Unsurprisingly, the question of justice emerges from broader considerations of wealth, character, and happiness. Cephalus makes two claims that are significant for our topic. First, he asserts that the most important condition of happiness is the possession of an orderly and easily-contented character. Happiness requires moderation. Second, he argues that the possession of wealth is chiefly beneficial because it allows its possessor to

¹²⁶ Cephalus was a wealthy merchant and a resident alien in Athens. Originally from Syracuse, he came to Athens at the invitation of Pericles. He lived in the Piraeus, where he also owned a shield factory which, according to one commentator, "was probably the largest business in Athens" (Beverluis 2000, p. 186). According to his son Lysias (in *Against Erotasthenes*, cited in Allan 1993, p. 18), he lived in Athens for thirty years, during which time he never had occasion to enter the courts either as a plaintiff or a defender. Further, he several times voluntarily undertook the liturgies expected of wealthy citizens, even though his status as resident alien exempted him from such duties. After his death, during the reign of the Thirty, his holdings were seized, Polemarchus was executed, and Lysias escaped into exile, from which he returned with the democrats when the Thirty fell.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Barker 1957, pp. 153-55, Strauss 1964, p. 65, Bloom 1991, pp. 312, 443 n. 21, and Annas 1981, pp. 20-21. Although scholars generally agree that Cephalus represents respectable opinion, scholars disagree when it comes to evaluating Cephalus' character. At one extreme, he is held to be a good old man who, because he is already good, has nothing to learn from Socrates (Reeve 1988, pp. 6-9; see also Nettleship 1901, pp. 15-16, Joseph 1966, p. 8, and Beverluis 2000, pp. 185-202). At the other extreme, he is pronounced a "bourgeois philistine" who offers nothing but "platitudes" (Pappas 2003, p. 31; see also Friedlander 1969, II: p. 55, Bloom 1991, p. 312, 314, Annas 1981, pp. 20-21, Howland 1993, pp. 57-63). Dobbs 1994 (pp. 671-73) denies that Cephalus represents true piety.

be just and pious and thereby enjoy the expectation of a good afterlife. Happiness, on the whole, requires justice. He proves unable to sustain either opinion. Most importantly, although he assumes that he knows what justice is, he proves unable (or unwilling) to articulate it. As a result, his praises of justice and moderation are insufficient responses to the kinds of criticisms that we have seen leveled in the previous chapters by Polus and Callicles.

1.1. Old Age and Wealth (327a-330c)

Socrates and Glaucon had gone to the Piraeus in order to witness the inauguration of the festival of Bendis (see 327a and 354a). Having done so, they are intercepted by Polemarchus before they can return to town as they had planned. Polemarchus and Adeimantus playfully compel and entice Socrates and Glaucon to retire to Polemarchus' home for dinner (327a-328b). Having arrived at Polemarchus' house, Socrates is warmly greeted by Cephalus, Polemarchus' aged father, who has just returned from performing a sacrifice in the courtyard. Socrates initiates the conversation by asking Cephalus about old age and whether it is a hard time of life (328c-e)

Cephalus' responses to this and subsequent questions are concerned with the relative importance of pleasure, good character, and wealth for happiness. He begins by seeming to claim that good character is sufficient for happiness and, thus, that happiness is determined by character and not by youth or old age (328e-329d). In particular, he insists that happiness depends on having an orderly and easily contented temperament (a *kosmios* and *eukolos tropos*, 329d). Upon further questioning, he retreats from this

position and asserts that good character is certainly necessary but not sufficient: one also needs money (329d-330a). One must be decent (*epieikēs*) to be happy, but a decent man needs wealth in addition. It immediately becomes clear that Cephalus does not say this out of greed. Having inherited his great wealth, he takes it for granted and is not by temperament a money-maker or praiser of wealth (330a-c). However much his lack of greed testifies to the sincerity of his praise for moderation, his complacency with regard to wealth nonetheless suggests that he underestimates the importance of material wealth for happiness—hence Socrates had to remind him.¹²⁸ In line with this, it becomes apparent that in truth Cephalus considers pleasure much more important for happiness than his praise for moderation might have seemed to imply. In fact, he seems to praise moderation for the pleasant tranquility it brings (consider 329c in light of 328d).¹²⁹ In short, the substance of happiness does not lie in good character but in the good things that wealth, accompanied by moderation, allows one to enjoy.

In light of this result, Cephalus' opinion appears not to diverge as much from that of Polus as might first have appeared. Both place happiness in the enjoyment of material prosperity. The whole dispute concerns whether moderation is truly better than immoderation and, hence, with whether it is truly better to be content with what one has (as Cephalus seems to suggest) or to strive for as much as possible (as Polus believes). As we have already seen in the *Gorgias* (see, for example, *Gorgias* 507c-508c), the value of justice depends on the answer one gives to these questions. Cephalus has asserted the

¹²⁸ Cf. Bloom 1991, pp. 313. Annas 1981 and Pappas 2003 are the most insistent on Cephalus' overall complacency.

¹²⁹ He is, in Stanley Rosen's (2005, p. 27) words, a "temperate hedonist." In this regard, it might be worth comparing this passage with *Gorgias* 492e-494a.

superiority of moderation on the grounds of its superior peacefulness. One may wonder, given that his friends considered themselves better off when they could enjoy greater pleasures, and given that Cephalus himself appears to have enjoyed those pleasures, whether this reason is as convincing as Cephalus believes (or would like it) it to be.

1.2. Justice (330d-331d)

In light of the importance Cephalus attributes to wealth, it is unsurprising that Socrates asks him what the greatest good is that he has enjoyed on account of his great wealth (330d). Cephalus gives him an answer that he admits many people would not find persuasive. He says that new fears come over a man who, upon reaching old age, confronts his own mortality. As a youth, he had ridiculed the stories which told of the gods punishing souls in Hades for the injustices they had committed on earth; as he approaches death, he begins to fear that these tales might be true. Cephalus admits that he does not know whether this fear is well-founded, saying that it might be attributable to genuine insight brought by proximity to death, or it may merely be a mark of senility. Either way, the fear of divine retribution grows, and it moves a person to review his life to see if he has done anything unjust that might be punished. Those who find much injustice are stricken with terror;¹³⁰ while those who have committed no injustice are filled with “sweet and good hope” as they approach death, knowing that they have

¹³⁰ His description of the unjust man’s fears is vivid, but that need not mean that he himself has had them. Likewise, his zealous sacrificial activity need not imply that he is atoning for something in particular. It could be that he is being especially careful now that he is near death. Bloom (1991, p. 313) goes too far when he says that, “For a man like Cephalus, life is always split between sinning and repenting.” Rosen (2005, p. 29) seems correct to say that justice simply was not a great concern of his before he grew old, but not that he was therefore especially unjust.

“live[d] out a just and holy life” (330d-331a). The greatest good that wealth provides to the “decent and orderly” man is this sweet hope derived from consciousness of one’s own justice and its promised reward. As he says, “The possession of money contributes a great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one’s will, and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a god or money to a human being” (331a-b). This is not the *only* use of money, but surely one of the greatest for an “intelligent” (*noun echonti*) man (331b).

The implications of his speech are clear, and we have seen some of them before. Injustice is not inherently unprofitable. It is rendered unprofitable through punishment. Punishment requires detection, which means that a successful committer of injustice could completely avoid punishment. The tales which tell of avenging gods in the afterlife are, Cephalus admits, doubtful, which means that justice may have only a human sanction. Justice is not intrinsically profitable the way successful injustice would be. Justice is contingently related to happiness by means of material sufficiency in this life and avenging gods in the next.¹³¹ Why, then, should a wealthy “intelligent man” be just, according to Cephalus? Because his wealth puts within his reach enough of the good things in life, he has no further need to commit injustice to acquire more of them. In this way, without losing in happiness he can avoid risking punishment in the afterlife, should those avenging gods turn out to exist. On the other hand, given the uncertainty of the punishment, a poor person, or someone with more demanding appetites, might be quite

¹³¹ See Bloom 1991, pp. 314, 315-16, Irwin 1995, pp. 170-71, Beversluis 2000, p. 191.

willing to take the risk. We are thereby led back to the problems with ordinary opinions concerning justice that we saw in our discussion of Polus.

Before turning to Socrates' response, it is worth grasping the understanding of justice implicit in Cephalus' comment. If we restrict our attention to what he says about justice towards human beings, we see that he has given the following as examples of injustice: cheating or lying to someone (even against one's will), and failure to repay a debt (even if that failure is the result of natural death rather than negligence). This conception of justice might seem to be too narrow, leaving out, as it does, all sorts of activities or interactions that also fall under the norms of justice.¹³² Leo Strauss (1964, p. 68) has persuasively argued, however, that this narrowness is not the product of a narrowness of vision but rather of concern. Money is particularly useful for fulfilling one's obligations in the areas he mentions, and Cephalus has been asked about the uses of money.

His broader conception of justice, however, would seem to be identical with the one invoked by Polus and Callicles: justice as fairness (*to ison*) and the lawful (*to nomimon*).¹³³ He conceives of justice as fairness insofar as his examples of injustice are instances where one "gets the better" (*pleon echein*) of someone else by taking what belongs to them. He conceives of justice as the lawful insofar as the law is the primary source of knowledge of what belongs to each and what is owed to each.¹³⁴ (Thus he can

¹³² Taylor (2001, p. 266) and Friedlander (1969, p. 55) both see it as a form of "merchant morality" proper to a man like Cephalus.

¹³³ See Strauss 1964, pp. 68 and 70, Bloom 1991, pp. 315-16, Irwin 1995, p. 173, and Annas 1981, p. 20. See also Vlastos 1968, p. 667.

¹³⁴ See, again, Strauss 1964, p. 70. Taylor (2001, p. 266) thus goes too far when he denies that Cephalus identifies the just with the legal. Cephalus implicitly relies on this identification insofar as his examples of

be conscious that he has done no injustice because what justice demands is not difficult to discern.)

The previous two chapters have shown that this conception of justice is questionable. In this conversation, however, Socrates is not conversing with someone eager to exploit the ambiguities of this understanding of justice in order to make a case for the profitability of injustice. Hence, Socrates is not moved by this to give a defense of justice. Rather, he questions Cephalus' assumption that he knows what justice is (and, thus, that he has done what it demands).

Socrates praises what Cephalus has said, but he disputes the notion of justice that Cephalus has implicitly relied upon. According to Socrates, Cephalus has defined justice as "the truth and giving back what a man has taken from another" (331c), or "speaking the truth and giving back what one takes" (331d).¹³⁵ To show him the limits of this definition, Socrates presents him the following scenario. Suppose that a sane man deposits his weapons with a friend, and then later, having gone insane, demands them back. Surely it would not be just to return the weapons, even though they are certainly the insane man's property, or to be willing to tell an insane man the whole truth. Cephalus agrees without hesitation (331c-d). Therefore, Socrates concludes, Cephalus' definition of justice is incorrect, since speaking the truth and giving back what is owed are sometimes just, sometimes unjust. Before Cephalus has a chance to respond,

"having more" presuppose the legal concept of property. (In this regard, it is worth consulting Xenophon's *Cyropaideia*, 1.3.16-18.) Polus had made a similar identification, involving, however, a different aspect of "property" (*Gorgias* 471a-c).

¹³⁵ See Strauss 1964, pp. 67-68 for one explanation why Socrates leaves out obligations to the gods in his statement of Cephalus' definition of justice.

Polemarchus thrusts himself into the conversation. Cephalus willingly hands it over to him and leaves to attend to more sacrifices (331d).

It is true, of course, that Cephalus had not explicitly offered a “definition” of justice—probably because he did not think one was needed; but he certainly assumes that he knows what justice is. Cephalus’ implicit definition of justice fails because following the general maxims he has referred to is not just in every circumstance, only in most. Thus, an adequate definition of justice must be able to articulate a principle that accounts both for why those maxims are generally valid and for why sometimes justice demands that these maxims be disregarded. That principle, and not the general rules or their occasional exceptions, would be the true definition of justice.¹³⁶ To find this principle, Cephalus would have to uncover the intention of the law, since it is law that defines and protects what is owed. The nature of Socrates’ counter-example suggests that this principle would involve refraining from mutual harm.¹³⁷

Instead of attempting to articulate this principle, Cephalus quickly leaves the conversation. This suggests that he may be unable to articulate it. To that extent, he cannot simply assume that he knows what justice is or what it demands. It is true that he is not completely ignorant: he recognizes the force of Socrates’ counterexample and grants it immediately. That counter-example was uncomplicated, however. One cannot

¹³⁶ See Bloom 1991, pp. 315-16, and Stauffer 2001, p. 25.

¹³⁷ Sallis (1996, p. 327) thus overstates the implications of Cephalus’ acceptance of Socrates’ counterexample when he says that “justice, for Cephalus, is simply a matter of self-interest. It has no bearing on the good of others.” I see no evidence for such an uncharitable interpretation of Cephalus’ character. On the other hand, while it is possible, as Strauss (1964, p. 69) and Stauffer (2001, p. 25) have suggested, that Cephalus believes that justice or acts of justice must in some way be beneficial, it would be more cautious to distinguish between refraining from harm and active benevolence. The latter will be treated in the discussion with Polemarchus ahead. Cephalus may believe justice essentially consists only in refraining from harming others by respecting legal boundaries. In that case, justice may, as Nichols (1987, pp. 42-43) has suggested, be conceived of as a mixed good and not a pure one.

conclude from it alone that Cephalus has always had a correct “intuition” of the right thing to do. Hence, if those avenging gods exist, he cannot be sure what to expect from them. None of this, of course, is meant to suggest that Cephalus is a particularly bad man,¹³⁸ but it shows the limits of his self-knowledge and perhaps the limits of the conceptions underlying many respectable opinions about justice. For the most part he goes about his business on the assumption that he is doing what he ought.

On the whole, the exchange with Cephalus throws up a number of problems with no resolutions. Perhaps most significant for our topic, we see that Cephalus has unwittingly reprised the problems of justice that emerged in the *Gorgias*. He has praised moderation, but shown an estimation of pleasure and wealth that might lead a less scrupulous or less easily-contented person to pursue excessive pleasures such as those his friends lament the lack of. As we have seen in previous chapters, the rejection of moderation naturally raises the question whether justice is good or perhaps in conflict with the greatest happiness. By his own admission, Cephalus admits that what would be the trustiest sanction for human justice—divine justice—may not exist. He cannot articulate what human justice consists of, although he recognizes that it is not simply identical with obeying the laws. Until a definition of justice is established, the question of its goodness (raised by Cephalus’ confusions) cannot be answered. On the other hand, since Socrates presents the problem as one of definition, the implicit doubts about the

¹³⁸ As Beversluis (2000, p. 201) has rightly said, Cephalus’ “practical ability to be just outstrips his theoretical ability to explain justice. Theoretical ability does not entail moral bankruptcy.” Quite right, but the true demands of justice *may* outstrip his “practical ability to be just” to the extent that he lacks the theoretical ability to recognize them.

goodness of justice need not be brought to the surface, nor does Cephalus have any reason to wish to do so. Nonetheless, this exchange has, if anything, reinforced the doubts stemming from the critiques delivered by Polus and Callicles. Cephalus, representative of respectable opinion, would not seem to be capable of answering them.

2. Polemarchus (331d-336a)

As I have already remarked, Polemarchus is of particular importance because he is the only one of Socrates' interlocutors who both believes that justice is a good thing and tries to give a definition of it. (Most interlocutors do one or the other.) Thus, the difficulties present in his position emerge from out of an attempt to understand justice while maintaining its goodness, and he is led to incoherence by the uncompromising nature of his conviction of the goodness of justice.¹³⁹ He reveals thereby the difficulties that beset those who wish to retain the notion that justice, as it is (more or less) ordinarily understood, is a virtue in the strong sense of the term—a form of human excellence beneficial not only for others but also for its possessor. The impracticable conclusions to which he is driven by his admiration for justice finally induce Thrasymachus to take over the conversation in order to reveal that justice is not worthy of this admiration.

2.1. Polemarchus' Definition of Justice (331d-332d)

¹³⁹ Broadly speaking, this is also Nichols' (1987) thesis, although I understand its meaning differently.

Polemarchus initially appears to join the conversation in order to defend his father's definition by attributing it to the renowned poet Simonides.¹⁴⁰ Once Cephalus leaves, we learn that Simonides' definition is not identical to the one he gave. According to Polemarchus, Simonides said that "it is just to give to each what is owed" (*to ta opheilomena hekastōi apodidonai*).¹⁴¹ Polemarchus adds that he considers this an admirable (or noble) assertion (331e).

This definition appears more promising. Because "what is owed" is more general than "what one has taken," "giving to each what is owed" is a principle that could potentially account for both the general rules to which Cephalus referred and the exceptions to them that are manifestly just—provided one could determine what, precisely, *is* owed.¹⁴² But that is what is in question. As Socrates says, Simonides clearly could not have meant (as was just being discussed) that it would be just to "giv[e] back to any man whatsoever something he has deposited when, of unsound mind (*mē sōphronōs*), he demands it," despite the fact that, by the letter of the law, the deposit is "owed" to him (331e-332a; cf. 331c). Polemarchus agrees that Simonides meant no such thing (332a).¹⁴³ The force of this counterexample thus compels Polemarchus to interpret (rather than merely assert) what Simonides has said. He must say what is owed.

¹⁴⁰ As Bloom (1991, pp. 316-17) remarks, this is the last time an authority is invoked in the search for justice.

¹⁴¹ Polemarchus leaves out the obligation to tell the truth (cf. 331b, c with 331e). At this point, the omission is not remarkable in itself. It could be that Polemarchus understands the truth as being part of "what is owed," or he may have sacrificed precision for the sake of presenting the most nobly-stated definition of justice he knows of. For the more general significance of his omission, see Strauss 1964, p. 68. Strauss points out that the omission prefigures Socrates' future introduction of medicinal lies.

¹⁴² See also Annas 1981, p. 23, and Stauffer 2001, p. 27

¹⁴³ Socrates offers a much broader counterexample to Polemarchus than he did to Cephalus, substituting "anyone whatsoever" for "friend" and "something" for "sword." The shift from "friend" to "anyone whatsoever" is consistent with Cephalus' understanding of justice; his own descriptions of just obligations

According to Polemarchus, Simonides did not intend to say that justice requires returning any and every deposit to anyone, sane or mad; rather, by “giving to each what is owed” he meant that “friends owe it to friends to do some good and nothing bad” (*philois...opheilein tous philous agathon men ti dran, kakon de mēden*, 332a).

Consequently, as Socrates concludes, returning weapons or a deposit to a madman is not just when “the taker and giver are friends” and “when the giving and the taking turn out to be bad” (332a-b). Unlike Cephalus, Polemarchus makes clear why Socrates’ counterexample is valid: to render something to a madman would be to harm him (potentially, at least), and justice prohibits doing harm—at least to one’s friends.

Therein lies the difficulty. Polemarchus’ definition seems too narrow to account for all of the obligations of justice.¹⁴⁴ However much it may be true that friends, united by mutual goodwill, not only wish to benefit one another but owe their assistance to one another, and thus ought not ever harm one another, the mutual obligations of friends do nothing to explain our just obligations to those who are not our friends.¹⁴⁵

Instead of pointing this out, Socrates asks Polemarchus whether we must also render to our enemies what we owe them. Polemarchus had said nothing of them. Polemarchus emphatically asserts that we do (cf. 335b). “[A]n enemy owes his enemy

(telling the truth and returning what one has taken) were entirely general and not contingent on the other party being a friend. The shift from “sword” to “something” (i.e., “anything”) is less easy to understand. Both cases, however, point to the same principle: insanity justifies a suspension of legal rights to property in order to prevent potentially harmful use of that property. See Stauffer 2001, p. 28 for one account of the broader implications Socrates’ expansion may have.

¹⁴⁴ See Cross and Woosley 1964, p.22. See also Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1.4.

¹⁴⁵ Neither Cephalus’ initial statements (331b) nor Socrates’ second counterexample (331e-332a) suggest that the obligations mentioned are contingent upon friendship.

the very thing which is also fitting (*prosēkei*): some harm” (332b).¹⁴⁶ Polemarchus may not have offered this initially, but his readiness in offering it now, in light of what he says later (cf. 334b, 335b), suffices for us to conclude that harming enemies is genuinely included within Polemarchus’ own understanding of justice and its demands. It is not foisted on him by Socrates.

Socrates and Polemarchus would seem, then, to have arrived at a definition of justice: to render to each what is fitting, which means rendering benefits to friends and harm to enemies. Thus Socrates concludes that Simonides’ definition of justice had been something of a riddle. He meant that justice is rendering to each what is *fitting* (*prosēkon*), but he called this rendering what is *owed* (*opheilomenon*, 332b-c).¹⁴⁷

The logic behind the claim that it is fitting to help friends and harm enemies is clear enough. It is fitting to help friends because friends are bound together by mutual affection, concern, and gratitude. Mutual solicitude is good for everyone involved. Likewise, it is fitting to harm enemies because enemies are dangerous to oneself and one’s friends. One does not have a duty to one’s enemies to harm them; one has a duty to one’s friends, to one’s group. Thus, according to Polemarchus, justice consists in being a

¹⁴⁶ Polemarchus does not mean that we have an obligation *to* our enemies to harm them, but that we owe it to *our friends* to harm our (mutual) enemies; hence, Polemarchus expressly mentions the notion of the “fitting” when explaining what it owed to enemies. There was less need for this when discussing what is owed to friends, since the notion of mutual obligation is immediately intelligible in that case.

¹⁴⁷ See Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 1.3.16-18 for an instance of the difference between the fitting and the owed.

trustworthy and loyal member of one's group—be it one's friends in the ordinary sense, or in the extended sense of one's family, tribe, or city.¹⁴⁸

Although it is not what he explicitly intends (see 334c, for example), the specifically *political* interpretation of Polemarchus' definition is the most promising. According to this interpretation, the city is the preeminent and most important group to which a person belongs.¹⁴⁹ On such an interpretation, the "friends" with respect to whom one's duties are determined are in the first place one's fellow citizens; likewise, one's enemies would be the citizens of hostile (or potentially hostile) cities. The demands of justice would be rooted in the mutual dependence and mutual concerns of citizens, guided by a sense of common interest. It would be especially concerned with acquiring and securing the good things in life for one's communities, as well as with ensuring peace (if not true "friendship") among the citizenry.¹⁵⁰ The view receives its dignity both from the affection or pride we feel for our communities¹⁵¹ and from the talent, dedication, and even sacrifice that service to the community demands. At the same time (and as we shall

¹⁴⁸ For the explicitly political interpretation of Polemarchus' principle, see Strauss 1953, p. 150 n. 24 and Strauss 1964, p. 73. He has been followed by Benardete 1989, p. 16, Bloom 1991, pp. 317-18, and Stauffer 2001, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Bloom (1991, p. 312) calls this "the gentleman's view" of justice—that of the upstanding citizen; cf. Strauss 1964, p. 73 and Page 1990, p. 251. At first glance, the metic Polemarchus might seem ill-suited to represent the citizen's view of justice. Nonetheless, this interpretation does gain support from other statements in the *Republic*: Polemarchus' subsequent declaration that a friend is most useful in forming alliances and doing battle (332e); and, more significantly, Socrates' repeated assertion that the auxiliary guardians must have a disposition eager to help friends (their fellow citizens) and harm enemies (outsiders). One need not conclude from this, however, that Polemarchus *intends* his account of justice to be interpreted politically. From the examples he gives later (334c), he would seem to have in mind "friends" in the ordinary sense of the word rather than fellow citizens. Thus, in the first instance Polemarchus understands justice on the model of friendship rather than patriotism. (For an excellent discussion of the relation between these two, see Page 1990.) Even so, the two interpretations of justice share a common principle: that of being a loyal and serviceable member of one's group. It is this notion that receives subsequent analysis.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Bloom 1991, pp. 318, 320. For more on Polemarchus and the common good, consider Bosanquet 1895, pp. 53-55.

¹⁵¹ This is a prominent theme in Page 1990.

see) the value of justice is thereby determined by the value of the community to which it is subservient.¹⁵²

Interpreted in this manner, Polemarchus' definition would appear far superior to Cephalus'. At first Polemarchus' definition seemed less promising on account of its narrowness, but much of this narrowness disappears if it is conceived of in political terms. One has obligations to all one's fellow citizens regardless of whether they are "friends" in the strict sense. Likewise, the general identity of the just with the lawful is retained, since it is law which regulates fellow citizens' conduct towards one another and (through this and through its support for property) determines what is "owed."

Polemarchus' view goes beyond Cephalus by bringing in something the latter did not mention: the notion of the common interest.¹⁵³ Cephalus had presented justice primarily in terms of commercial exchanges between otherwise unrelated individuals. It is precisely in this perspective, focused on property and material goods and self-interest, that the goodness of justice appears most questionable. Polemarchus' definition would seem to suppose that there are some goods which are genuinely shared, in which case justice would be good and necessary.

2.2. The Cross-Examination of Polemarchus' Definition (332c-336a)

In the course of Socrates' cross-examination of Polemarchus' definition, several other of the latter's beliefs about justice emerge: most importantly, the beliefs that good human beings are necessarily just (334d), that it is never just to harm someone who is not

¹⁵² Cf. Benardete 1989, p. 17 for more on this.

¹⁵³ Cf. Bloom 1991, p. 317.

unjust (334d), and that justice is human virtue (335c). It should be clear from these statements that in the course of the cross-examination Socrates moves from considering Polemarchus' proposed *definition* of justice to considering other beliefs Polemarchus has *about* justice. Thus, the search for a definition is temporarily tacitly abandoned—or, more precisely, the search for the definition is guided by the conviction that justice is virtue, with all that implies.¹⁵⁴ This serves to reveal the tensions within Polemarchus' views about justice, and these tensions move him eventually to abandon his proposed definition. When Polemarchus begins to perceive that his definition clashes with his conception of the goodness of justice, he forsakes his initial definition.¹⁵⁵ Justice cannot consist simply in being a good member of one's group unless membership in the group is contingent upon being virtuous—which is impossible when it comes to family or city (if not with friends). Only if “good” means “loyal” is the good citizen (or friend) identical to the good man simply. Polemarchus is forced to recognize that virtue and loyalty are not, however, the same thing.

2.2.1. The First Part of the Cross-Examination (332c-334b)

Socrates begins his cross-examination in an almost perverse manner, treating justice as though it were a form of technical expertise (*technē*), and comparing it with other arts—though it is clear that Polemarchus does not understand justice to be such (see, again, 332d).¹⁵⁶ Socrates' rationale would seem to be that, since Polemarchus has

¹⁵⁴ Stauffer 2001, pp. 57-58 makes this point especially well.

¹⁵⁵ In this I follow Nichols 1987.

¹⁵⁶ Beversluis (2000, p. 207) is especially insistent on marking Polemarchus' hesitation here. He clearly does not consider justice a matter of technical expertise.

defined justice relative to the good, and since he has admitted that it is not always good to adhere to the letter of the law, justice requires knowledge of the good (or the fitting). Since the arts are the preeminent examples of knowledge of the good based on independent reason, justice may bear comparison with them.¹⁵⁷ As we shall see, the comparison also serves to reveal other beliefs about justice which show why justice cannot be an art like other arts (if it is an art at all).

Having determined that justice requires rendering what is fitting, Socrates asks Polemarchus what owed and fitting things the arts of medicine and cooking administer, and to what. Polemarchus answers, food and drinks to bodies, and seasonings to meats, respectively (332c-d). Socrates then asks what owed and fitting things the art of justice administers, and to what. Polemarchus responds, “If the answer has to be consistent with what preceded,” then justice is the art that “gives benefits and harms to friends and enemies” (332d). From this Socrates concludes, and Polemarchus concurs, that “justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies” (*hē tois philois te kai echthrois ōphelias te kai blabas apodidousa*, 332d). Since friendship or enmity determines what is fitting, “doing good to friends and harm to enemies” is the more fundamental definition than “rendering to each what is fitting.”

Using analogies to the arts, Socrates asks Polemarchus “in what action (*praxeī*) and with respect to what work (*ergon*)” a just man is most beneficial to friends and harmful to enemies (332e). A doctor, for example, is useful when it comes to matters of health and disease, while a pilot is useful for navigation. Polemarchus answers

¹⁵⁷ As Bloom (1991, p. 319) argues.

immediately that a just man is most useful “in making war and being an ally in battle” (*en tōi prospolemein kai en tōi summachein*, 332e). Contrary to the claims of some scholars,¹⁵⁸ this response is quite reasonable. It is not meant to be an exhaustive account of the usefulness of justice. It is, rather, a straightforward response to Socrates question concerning where the just man is *most* able to help friends and harm enemies. War, which carries with it perhaps the greatest dangers, readily presents itself as a situation where a loyal friend is most useful.¹⁵⁹ We should note, moreover, that Polemarchus does not need the analogy with the arts to arrive at this answer. He does not mean that justice is the art of war (cf. 332e with 333d). He is, as before, speaking of justice as loyalty.¹⁶⁰

Instead of making explicit Polemarchus’ understanding of the particular character of justice as loyalty, Socrates shifts ground. He asks whether justice is useful only in war, or whether it is also useful in peacetime. After all, medicine is not useful for those who are not sick, nor is piloting useful for those not at sea. As we could expect, Polemarchus emphatically affirms that justice is useful in peacetime. Comparing justice to farming and shoemaking, Socrates asks him, “For the use (*chreian*) or acquisition (*ktēsin*) of what,” then, is justice useful in peacetime (333a)? Polemarchus answers that justice is useful in contracts (*sumbolaia*).¹⁶¹ Socrates quickly gets him to confirm that he

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Friedlander 1969, II: p. 56, and Beversluis 2000, p. 209.

¹⁵⁹ Incidentally, the offering of war as the preeminent sphere of activity for the just man supports the political interpretation of Polemarchus’ definition, since “enemies” in this case would have to be enemy *soldiers*. (Nothing in the text suggests that Polemarchus has civil war in mind.) This does not mean that “friends” must be all fellow citizens.

¹⁶⁰ See Bloom 1991, pp. 317-18.

¹⁶¹ According to LSJ, *sumbolaion* in Athens referred especially to tokens acknowledging a loan. The mentioning of *sumbolaia*, and the defense of his father’s definition, seems to be the root of Friedlander’s (1969, I: pp. 53-55, 57, 59, 60) opinion that Polemarchus is essentially “a wealthy merchant” in whom “the capitalistic spirit is so strong...that it swallows up all other relationships” (p. 57). He fails (see p. 56) to

meant by contracts “partnerships” (*koinōnēmata*)—the undertaking of common endeavors.

In offering contracts as the preeminent sphere for the exercise of justice in peacetime, Polemarchus has begun to re-approach his father’s understanding of justice. To say that a just man is useful in contracts is to say that an *honest* man is useful in contracts. He does not specifically have in mind here the trusty friend at one’s side but rather any man who can be trusted to keep his word. It may be true that a friend would be especially trustworthy in these matters, but here and for the rest of this passage (333a-e) Polemarchus does not appear to have transactions between friends especially in mind. Not everybody who refrains from cheating does so out of friendship.

Viewed from Polemarchus’ intention, the most that can be said is that “contracts” ought to be extended to “partnerships” because he has in mind respect for all forms of property, not just money, as quickly becomes apparent. We may surmise, then, that Polemarchus, like everyone else so far, understands justice in terms of fairness or equality (*to ison*) in addition to helping friends and harming enemies; and the obligations of fairness extend beyond the bounds of friendship. He must find some way to account for this, given the weaknesses of this understanding of justice that we have seen in the last two chapters.

Having established that justice is useful in peacetime for partnerships, Socrates next asks *what* partnerships Polemarchus is talking about. He easily shows that justice is not useful when it comes to *doing* anything in common. If one were playing checkers or

note that Polemarchus has already contradicted this interpretation of his character by offering war as the field wherein the just man is most useful (at 332e).

building a house, an expert checkers-player or a house builder would be a better partner. So in what sphere of peacetime activity is the just man the best partner (333a-b)? In money matters (*eis arguriou*), Polemarchus says (as his initial mention of *sumbolaia* would suggest). Socrates ignores the obvious implication of this statement (that Polemarchus *really is* talking about loans). Instead, he turns to the activity of spending money in common, showing that a just man would not be the best partner for this either. If one were buying a horse, one would want an expert in horses; when it comes to ships, one would want a shipbuilder or pilot (333b-c). Polemarchus replies that the just man is the best partner in money matters when money must be deposited and kept safe. (He thus explicitly returns to his earlier answer that justice is useful in contracts, since, as noted, a *sumbolaion* is a loan.)

Socrates concludes from this that justice, as the art of keeping deposits safe, is useful for money when the money itself is useless—that is, when it is not being used. Likewise with any possession (such as weapons or lyres or pruning hooks), justice is useful when these possessions are not being used, but useless when the possessions are in use. When the possessions are in use, the expert in their use is the useful partner, not the just man (333c-d). Socrates thus concludes that justice “is useful for useless things,” and therefore is not “anything serious” (333d-e).

As we remarked, the rationale for the turn to the arts seemed to be that Polemarchus (who certainly considers justice something serious and useful) had defined justice in such a way that the practice of justice required knowledge of the good and not merely knowledge of the law. Socrates, as we see, has been treating justice as though it

itself would be that knowledge.¹⁶² Polemarchus, however, quite clearly thinks, like the other interlocutors we have seen, that the knowledge of good things is easy to come by. The benefits and harms he has in mind are obvious.¹⁶³ He does not understand justice to be the expertise which supplies knowledge of what is good. Nor, as this exchange makes clear, does he consider justice to be expertise with regard to the *means* for supplying good things. Such expertise is found in the various particular arts. As mentioned before, Polemarchus' true opinion is that justice is a disposition which guides one's activities, including the practice of the arts: the desire or intention to help friends and harm enemies, or, as we have now also seen, the disposition to respect what belongs to others (even if these others are not friends—provided, it seems, that they are not enemies).¹⁶⁴ Thus, justice presupposes knowledge of the good and knowledge of how to produce the good in order to be beneficial.¹⁶⁵

Why, however, would Socrates want to treat justice as a form of knowledge rather than as a disposition presupposing knowledge? What does this tell us about Polemarchus' understanding of justice? Seth Benardete (1989, p. 18) and Allan Bloom (1991, p. 322), among others,¹⁶⁶ have made the following plausible suggestion. If there were a form of knowledge that governed all spheres of activity the way Polemarchus thinks the disposition of justice does, it would have to be a comprehensive form of

¹⁶² In this respect his argument here bears comparison with what he says to Polus about rhetoric at *Gorgias* 466e-467a.

¹⁶³ As Bloom 1991, p. 325 mentions.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Rosen 2005, p. 34.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Bosanquet 1895, pp. 43-44. This is one reason why it is provocatively narrow-minded for Socrates to suggest that justice is useful only for useless things. That captures the aspect of justice as respecting what belongs to others, but it ignores justice as the intention that guides one's positive activities. That is because he has been treating justice as one art among others rather than a disposition or intention which governs one's activities; cf. Annas 1981, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶ For example, Crombie 1962, I: p. 80.

knowledge which incorporates and organizes the various goods that the other arts supply. It would have to be a “master art.” It would, in fact, have to be the very knowledge of the good that, as we just saw, the practice of justice presupposes—the knowledge that Polemarchus thought so easily obtained.

Justice as knowledge would have to be more than that, however. Since knowledge of the human good is necessarily knowledge of one’s own good, and since justice, as ordinarily conceived, involves concern for the good of others, one would still have to determine how (or whether) knowledge of one’s own good and action on it would lead someone to be just in the ordinary sense of refraining from *pleonexia* (at least with respect to one’s friends). Indeed, as Devin Stauffer (2001, pp. 38-39) has pointed out (following the suggestion of Strauss 1964, p. 72), if the practice of justice as ordinarily conceived were truly in one’s own interest, and if one knew this, there would be no need for an intention or disposition in addition to that knowledge. And, as Stauffer goes on to point out, this implies that admiration for the just disposition (and the belief that just dispositions are needed) is implicitly based on the belief that just actions can (often) be *contrary* to our self-interest. One’s justice would be good for others, but not for oneself. This defect would be mitigated by being a member of a group where the others are willing to act justly towards oneself in return. That by itself does not prove, however, that it would never be even more profitable to be unjust at least sometimes. Knowledge of one’s own interest, as Polemarchus seems to conceive of it, would not rule out unjust actions simply on the grounds of interest.

Either there is some other good that Polemarchus has not specified but which requires justice (in which case, however, there would be no need for justice as a disposition), or else the demands of justice are not always conducive to one's own good. Since Polemarchus obviously believes justice to be a disposition and does not mention any goods besides the most obvious ones, it is reasonable to conclude that he believes that the demands of justice can be contrary to one's self-interest. Here he is at one with common opinion (and the other interlocutors we have seen). This belief, however, was the very basis for the critiques of justice delivered by Polus and Callicles. Why would a rational person ever prefer the good of someone else to his own? That question has yet to be answered.

Polemarchus clearly admires justice and believes that he should be just. He seems, then, to believe that justice both is and is not good for the just man. His admiration for justice would seem to require that he not acknowledge this explicitly, since we have not yet seen anything in his beliefs that would rationally justify a preference for justice over injustice in light of these facts. As for why he admires justice in the first place, the simplest answer would be that he does so because that is what he has been taught. Through his education he has incorporated the notion that justice is a virtue. But we have already seen that the basis for this opinion and praise need not have any relation to the immediate considerations of the good of the just man himself.¹⁶⁷ But, as Socrates later says (492c), human beings practice what is honored, even when the grounds for that admiration are obscure.

¹⁶⁷ See again *Protagoras* 325c-326e and *Gorgias* 483b-484a.

Without waiting for Polemarchus to reply to his previous line of reasoning, Socrates immediately turns to proving that justice, as the art of guarding, is therefore also an art of stealing (333e-334b). Polemarchus had said that justice is useful in peacetime for guarding deposits and property and keeping them safe while not in use. Because “of whatever a man is a clever (*deinos*) guardian, he is also a clever thief,” Socrates reasons that the just man, who is the expert in guarding money, will also be best at stealing it. Hence justice turns out to be the art of stealing for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies, and the just man turns out to be “a kind of robber”—an opinion which he attributes to Homer.

Polemarchus rejects this interpretation of his principle. In one respect this is understandable. He had quite clearly meant that justice is useful for guarding things because the just man would not be willing to steal something that belongs to someone else. It is safe to leave one’s possessions in the protection of a just man. But Socrates, continuing to rely on the arts analogy, treats Polemarchus’ statement as though he meant that justice is the art of guarding, the expertise characteristic of, say, a security guard. It is true, of course, that experts in security are most able to evade the security measures of others;¹⁶⁸ but this consideration is not relevant to what Polemarchus has been talking about because, again, he is talking about a disposition rather than a form of expertise.¹⁶⁹

Although it seems beside the point, Socrates’ argument here does call attention to two important and related aspects of Polemarchus’ beliefs about justice. First, it is

¹⁶⁸ That is why companies will hire computer hackers to design their network security systems.

¹⁶⁹ Stauffer 2001, pp. 36-37 also makes this point.

unclear why Polemarchus would reject the notion that justice (as helping one's friends or, as in this context, one's city) would require stealing from an enemy or, more generally, harming them through dishonest means. Polemarchus' definition in no way explicitly requires that enemies be harmed only in "a fair fight." Why does Polemarchus reject this possibility?¹⁷⁰

This question points to the second implication of this passage. We already noted that, when talking about contracts, Polemarchus seemed to be presupposing the ordinary understanding of justice as fairness (*to ison*). We now see something perhaps even more fundamental. He may claim that justice consists of helping friends and harming enemies, but he clearly thinks that *injustice* consists of *pleonexia*—and not of harming friends and helping enemies. These two different understandings of justice may partly overlap (harming a friend to benefit oneself, for example), but they are not coextensive. Thus, since injustice consists of more than merely harming friends (and helping enemies), justice must consist of more than merely helping friends and harming enemies.

Polemarchus apparently believes that justice requires some restrictions even on one's behavior towards enemies and even when one is helping one's friends.¹⁷¹ This must be accounted for. The simplest explanation would be that enemies do not always *deserve* unscrupulous treatment, but Polemarchus has said nothing yet that would explain why this would be so. His reason for thinking that enemies do not always deserve harm becomes more explicit in the second part of his cross-examination.

¹⁷⁰ See Bloom 1991, p. 321-22 and Irwin 1995, p. 121 for more on this.

¹⁷¹ Irwin 1995, pp. 171-72 has noted this as well.

2.2.2. The Second Part of the Cross-Examination (334b-336a)

When Socrates concludes that justice is the art of theft for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies, Polemarchus asserts that that this was not what he meant at all, though he now is not sure what he did mean. He still maintains, however, that justice is helping friends and harming enemies (*ōphelein men tous philous...blaptein de tous echthrous*, 334b). There is still something good and noble in being a loyal friend, even if not everything is permitted in this cause. Socrates has refuted him without persuading him.

In the face of Polemarchus' reassertion of his definition of justice as helping friends and harming enemies, Socrates turns to two new considerations: who the friends are that one ought to help, and whether it is just to harm anyone at all. In the course of these considerations, Socrates shows that Polemarchus has other beliefs about justice that conflict with his explicit definition. First, Socrates shows that other beliefs that Polemarchus holds force him to admit that, if this definition is true, the possession of virtue must be a condition for friendship (334b-335b). Then he shows that Polemarchus has other beliefs that (subtly reinterpreted) commit him to the position that it is never just to harm anyone whatsoever, not even an enemy (335b-e). By appealing to Polemarchus' other positive beliefs about justice, Socrates finally succeeds in compelling Polemarchus to change his mind. Having successfully persuaded Polemarchus, Socrates gives a brief explanation of the origin of the belief that justice is helping friends and harming enemies and then abruptly declares that they have not yet found what justice is.

We have now seen that Polemarchus believes that justice consists in more than merely helping friends and harming enemies. In the face of Polemarchus' reassertion of his definition, Socrates reasonably turns to the question who a "friend" is. If friends deserve help and enemies harm, what qualifies them to be deserving of this treatment? Socrates asks Polemarchus whether a friend is someone that one believes to be good (*chrēstous*), or someone who truly is good, even if he does not seem to be (and likewise with enemies) (334c)? Polemarchus understandably says that one's friends are likely to be those one believes to be good, while one's enemies will be those one believes to be bad (*ponērous*) (334c). In this context it is clear that Polemarchus is talking about friends in the ordinary, "domestic" sense, and not (or not primarily) in the political sense. Some of one's fellow citizens may be bad, and some foreigners with whom one is at war may be good—even if not good to you.

Socrates sensibly points out to Polemarchus that human beings are liable to make mistakes in judging character. Polemarchus readily agrees. As a consequence, those who make mistakes will have some friends who are bad and some enemies who are good. Justice would seem to dictate that, in those cases where one is mistaken, one is obligated to help bad men and harm good ones. Polemarchus agrees, uneasily, clearly indicating that he does not like and did not anticipate this consideration (334c-d).¹⁷² Why, after all, should one admire inflicting harm on a good man for the sake of a bad one? If one were to consider his definition in light of its political interpretation, one could answer that in war it is sometimes necessary to harm good men, if they are enemies. This begs the

¹⁷² Cf. White 1979, p. 64.

question, however. Should one always be loyal to one's own city above all else, regardless of how vicious one's fellow citizens might be or how virtuous might be those of the enemy's city?

Socrates next shows that Polemarchus' other beliefs about justice, once they are made explicit, must force him to reject the notion that justice could require one to help bad men and harm good ones.¹⁷³ Polemarchus agrees genuinely and without argument to the proposition that "the good (*agathoi*) are just and such as not to do injustice (*mē adikein*)" (334d). As a consequence of this, in those cases where one is mistaken about the virtue of one's enemies, it would seem to be "just to treat badly (*kakōs poiein*) men who have done nothing unjust," since justice commands that one harm one's enemies. Polemarchus rejects this conclusion emphatically, saying that the argument must be faulty (or base, *ponēros*, 334d).

Polemarchus has just revealed two very important beliefs. If the good are just and such as not to do injustice, then one must be just in order to be a good man. This belief has been implicit all along, but Polemarchus now makes it explicit. He has also revealed the belief (stated without any qualification involving friends or enemies) that it is not just to harm those who have not done injustice. In light of the previously mentioned belief, this means that it is not just to harm good men. The obligations of justice are not determined solely by friendship or enmity. Hence, his admiration for the definition of justice as helping friends and harming enemies seems to rest on the tacit presupposition that one's friends are truly good and one's enemies truly bad. (Though we have yet to

¹⁷³ He thereby begins to reveal why Polemarchus so emphatically rejected the notion of the just man as a thief.

see what goodness and badness consist in besides justice and injustice.) He will not be able to sustain this.

Acknowledging Polemarchus' dissatisfaction with the argument, Socrates suggests as an alternative that "it is just to harm the unjust and help the just" (334d). Polemarchus affirms that this proposition is "more noble" than the previous one. The sentiment may be more noble, but it comes at the expense of clarity. Polemarchus has been brought to this position because he believes that only bad people deserve harm and so cannot say without qualification that it is just to help friends and harm enemies. But if this is revised to say that it is just to help the just and harm the unjust, the very definition of justice has dropped out. They are now talking *about* justice but not saying what it is. It seems most natural to assume that, at this point, he is using "just" and "unjust" in their more common sense of "fair" and "unfair" (or *pleonektēs*)—though it is difficult to see how the maxim, "it is just to help the just and not harm them," where justice is understood as fairness, is compatible with the political need to harm enemies. More will be said on this shortly.

Another unwelcome consequence follows from their restatement. If it is never just to harm good men, and if one sometimes makes mistakes with regard to one's friends and enemies, and if, consequently, some of one's enemies are good, while some of one's friends are bad, then it turns out that, on those occasions where one is mistaken, it is just to harm one's friends (since they are bad) and to help one's enemies (since they are good) (334d-e). This flatly contradicts Polemarchus' initial definition, and he rejects it. Nonetheless, he agrees that the conclusion follows logically from what they have said. A

set of ordinary beliefs has led him into a tangle: one should help friends, and one should help good men; one should not help bad men, but harm them; likewise, one should not help enemies, but harm them; nonetheless, not all of one's friends are good, nor all of one's enemies bad. The difference between the friend and the good man (and likewise with enemy and bad man) gives rise to contradictory demands.

Polemarchus is now aware of this fact, and responds accordingly. To clear up the mess, he proposes that they change the premises of their argument. In particular, he proposes that they change their definition of a friend and an enemy. A friend is not merely someone who seems good, but someone who actually is so; likewise, an enemy is someone who both seems and is bad (334e-335a). Socrates notes that, by this account, a good man would be a friend and a bad man would be an enemy,¹⁷⁴ and he concludes that, with these premises in place, it turns out they are saying that "it is just to do good to the friend, if he is good, and harm to the enemy, if he is bad" (335a). Polemarchus affirms that they have now said something noble (or admirable) (335b).

Verbally, Polemarchus manages in this manner to save his position somewhat. The goodness of justice as loyalty can be preserved if one stipulates that the group to which one belongs is good—if the good and one's own are the same. In this way, virtue would be a condition for friendship, and justice would consist in the mutual assistance of the good.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ As Stauffer (2001, p. 42) points out, this restatement on Socrates' part is actually an expansion. Consult Stauffer's account of its significance.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Taylor 2001, p. 267.

Nonetheless, his redefinition has two significant weaknesses. The first one we have seen already. He has shifted from defining justice to talking *about* justice. Given that the good are just, his redefinition says, in effect, that it is just to do good to a friend who is just. What makes the friend just cannot be that he, in turn, is disposed to do good to *his* just friends. Thus, not only does this statement leave out all the qualities besides justice that are necessary for qualifying as a “good man,” but justice itself is left out. As I remarked above, it is most natural to assume that he is thinking of justice as fairness in these exchanges—in which case a full justification of it would require a response to the attack leveled by Callicles. That is not, however, the direction the conversation goes in.

The second major weakness of Polemarchus’ redefinition is that it undermines almost all *actual* group loyalties (any that are not voluntary, at least), insofar as our circle of “friends” in the extended sense is determined much more contingently (as are our enemies).¹⁷⁶ To the extent, then, that he admires justice because it preserves actually existing communities or groups, his position is incoherent. As Stauffer (2001, p. 44) has suggested, this impasse reflects the fact that, for men like Polemarchus, justice raises hopes that it cannot fulfill. The security and order provided by a stable political community allows one (in principle) to guide one’s behavior by concern for virtue. The protection from the *pleonexia* of others allows one to be fair in one’s dealings without leaving oneself open to grave harm.¹⁷⁷ Neither of these conditions hold outside of one’s political community. When it comes to foreign relations, it may be necessary, for the

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Bloom 1991, p. 324, Nichols 1987, pp. 37, 43–44, 48, 51, and Stauffer 2001, pp. 43–44.

¹⁷⁷ Neither of these considerations, it should go without saying, prove that it is better to be just than to be unjust. But that is not the question yet.

preservation of one's community, to help fellow citizens and harm enemies without respect to the virtue or vice of each. The facts of political life dictate, then, that one's behavior towards others is determined (at least in part) by the wholly contingent fact of inclusion or exclusion from the group upon which one relies for survival. The person one is required to help because he is a fellow citizen would become an enemy deserving of harm had he been born (or should he become) a citizen of another city—even though his nature and his character would remain the same. From the standpoint of law, this is necessary, but from the standpoint of nature it is arbitrary. We will reflect more on this shortly.

In the final part of their exchange, Socrates convinces Polemarchus that it is never just to harm anyone, not even bad men (335b-335e). When Socrates asks him whether it is ever proper for a just man to harm anyone, Polemarchus affirms that the just man ought to harm “bad men and enemies” (*tous ge ponērous te kai echthrous*, 335b).¹⁷⁸ Here he gives voice to the common view—expressed also by Gorgias (*Gorgias* 456e)—that the unjust man, because he is dangerous to the community, and because he benefits himself by harming others, deserves harm. Polemarchus is referring, in other words, to considerations of retributive justice (as well as to the need to harm those who are trying

¹⁷⁸ Polemarchus' answer proves that the previous argument has not sunk in for him yet, since he says “bad men *and enemies*,” even though, according to his redefinition of friends and enemies, the only enemies he could justly harm would necessarily be “bad men.”

to harm one's own group: the bad man and the enemy may pose similar threats, but the enemy can do so without being a bad man).¹⁷⁹

Socrates then gains Polemarchus' assent to the proposition that whenever a being is harmed, it becomes worse (*cheirous*) with respect to its specific virtue. For example, when a horse is harmed, it becomes a worse horse; likewise, when a human being is harmed, he becomes a worse human being, worse with respect to human virtue (335b-c). Polemarchus then readily agrees with Socrates that justice is human virtue.¹⁸⁰ It therefore turns out that "human beings who have been harmed necessarily become more unjust" (335c).

This argument would appear to be a trick. When Polemarchus spoke of harming, he obviously had in mind harm in the sense of bodily or material harm, not damage to one's soul;¹⁸¹ nor is there any plausible ground for the claim that someone who has been harmed in body or material goods necessarily becomes more unjust thereby. (The argument of the *Gorgias* at 480c-d would, if anything, suggest the opposite.) Socrates nonetheless gets Polemarchus' agreement here because, as Stauffer (2001, pp. 46-47) has argued, he has put Polemarchus into a false dilemma: the person who is harmed becomes *either* better *or* worse; Socrates' analogies suggest that improvement could not be the

¹⁷⁹ As Page 1990 argues, although Polemarchus genuinely believes that justice requires that we harm others at times, the whole tenor of Polemarchus' contributions suggests that he has a primarily *defensive* understanding of the harm required. His ideally just man is not someone who aggressively and exploitively goes around seizing what belongs to others for the sake of his own group. Rather, he defends against outside aggression what he and his own have. However, as Socrates will shortly suggest (336a), and as he has already suggested (334a-b), Polemarchus has not proven that his understanding of justice is incompatible with unprovoked aggression.

¹⁸⁰ His agreement without argument to this proposition should not surprise us in light of 334d.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Beversluis 2000, pp. 215-16.

result of harm, therefore harm must make vicious. This false dilemma, incidentally, allows Socrates wholly to ignore the notion of deserved harm (but cf. 337d).¹⁸²

With proposition in hand that harming human beings makes them more unjust, Socrates next proves that it could never be the work of justice to render another person more unjust. Just as a skilled horseman could not, by practice of that skill, render someone else incompetent at horsemanship, and just as musicians cannot render others unmusical through the practice of music, a just person could not render others unjust through the practice of justice. Stated another way, a good person is unable to make others bad through the practice of virtue. Just as cooling is the work of coldness and not its opposite (heat), and just as dampening is the work of wetness and not its opposite (dryness), just so harming is the work of badness and not of its opposite, the good (335c-d). Since it is the just man who is good (and the unjust man who is bad), it follows that “it is not the work of the just man to harm either a friend or anyone else...but of his opposite the unjust man” (335d). Polemarchus declares this statement “entirely true.” Therefore, anyone who says that justice involves harming enemies is “not wise,” because “it has become apparent...that it is never just to harm anyone” (335e).

We have already noted that the facts of political life are incompatible with the demand that one harm enemies only if they are bad. The demand that no one be harmed is even more incompatible with them.¹⁸³ Practically speaking, the resolve never to harm anyone makes the just man totally useless in war—which was precisely what

¹⁸² As Stauffer (2001, p. 49) and Dorter (2006, p. 31) have insisted.

¹⁸³ Cf. Nichols 1987, pp. 47-48. Bloom (1991, p. 324) remarks that the resolution to harm no one is sensible only if the good (and necessary) things are neither scarce nor threatened—i.e., have nothing to do with the body or the other “good things” that are the primary subjects of justice ordinarily understood.

Polemarchus first singled out as the sphere of activity where the just man was *most* useful (cf. 332e), and which renders ironic his subsequent agreement to do battle as partners (*maxoumetha...koinēi*; cf. 332e) with Socrates against anyone who asserts that any “wise and blessed” man such as Simonides has said that harm is owed to enemies

Given this awkward fact, we must wonder why Polemarchus is nonetheless willing to accept this revision of his principle. The simplest answer is that he accepts these changes because (unlike the results of Socrates first line of questioning) they allow him to retain the belief that justice is both useful and serious (cf. 331e and 333e). Taken in the abstract, the definition of justice as helping good men and harming no one would seem to render justice wholly good.¹⁸⁴ In particular, it rules out the demand that one “get the better” of one’s enemies for the sake of one’s friends. The just man never has the need to “get the better” of anyone. To establish this, Polemarchus need only accept that virtue is the only good that matters. The apparent nobility of the redefinition blinds him to its impracticability since his priority is to maintain the goodness of justice and he has been forced to recognize that the “justice” that maintains one’s own cannot be entirely just (in the sense of rendering what is fitting *or* fair).

Indeed, we now learn from Socrates that Polemarchus’ original definition of justice (help friends, harm enemies) is a maxim compatible with great *injustice*. He suggests that the opinion that justice consists in helping friends and harming enemies “belongs to Periander, or Perdiccas, or Xerxes, or Ismenias the Theban, or some other

¹⁸⁴ Cf., again, Nichols 1987, pp. 37, 43-44, 51.

rich man who has a high opinion of what he can do.”¹⁸⁵ Helping friends and harming enemies is indeed an appropriate maxim for any person who wishes to aggrandize himself at the expense of others. One needs help and to get help one must give something in return.¹⁸⁶ It is a maxim appropriate to a tyrant (the proverbially unjust man) because, as Bloom (1991, p. 325) has suggested, Polemarchus has given no good reason why the maxim that governs inter-city relations should not also govern inter-personal relations, at least when one can get away with it. If cities have the right to be selfish at the expense of other cities, why would the same not hold for individuals in those cases where necessity does not dictate otherwise?

We are, at the end of their exchange, led back to the question whether it truly is more profitable to be just than to be unjust. If justice is human virtue and virtue is the only good that matters (as has been suggested in the argument), one could prove the superiority of justice. Unfortunately, by the time justice has been asserted to be human virtue, the ostensible search for its definition has been abandoned. Insofar as justice consists in fairness or helping friends and harming enemies (as these are ordinarily understood, as Polemarchus initially understood them), it is questionable whether justice is simply a virtue and it is false that justice (as virtue) is the only good that matters, since ordinary justice, as well as civic justice (helping friends, harming enemies), are manifestly in service to bodily and material goods.

3. Conclusion

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Gorgias* 492b-c.

¹⁸⁶ Socrates’ subsequent argument at 369b-c is an expansion on this observation.

The problem of justice in the *Republic* begins as a problem of definition. Cephalus had begun by implicitly defining justice as rendering to each his own, understood to mean refraining from harming others, by force or fraud, in their bodily integrity and their legally recognized possessions. Implicit in this view of justice are the beliefs that the virtue of justice is not intrinsically beneficial to its possessor and that unpunished injustice is profitable. Cephalus had further expressed doubt whether successful doers of injustice would receive punishment in the afterlife—meaning that unpunished injustice may be profitable simply. Thanks to his lifelong wealth and moderate appetites (relative to his wealth), Cephalus has never been tempted to be unjust and thus has never had to run the risk of punishment in the afterlife. Cephalus proved unable to say what, precisely, justice is, because he recognized that acts that are commonly considered unjust (lying or withholding a person's property from him) are actually just under certain circumstances. He was unable to articulate the principle that would account for this—even though it was fairly clear that it involved the prohibition of harm.

Polemarchus joined the conversation in order to defend his father's definition. He attempted to do so by rooting the negative demand of justice (do no harm) in a positive demand: do good to one's friends. He thus presented the demands of justice as rooted in mutual dependence and common interest of friends or fellow citizens, and the goodness of justice, its admirable quality, appeared to reside in the good it is in service to.

It turned out, however, that Polemarchus' admiration for justice rested on a tacit, even unconscious, identification of the serviceable friend (or the good citizen) and the

good man simply (or, otherwise put, an identification of the good with one's own). This identification proved untenable, since all manner of injustice (understood as *pleonexia*) is compatible with doing things that benefit one's group (given, as Polemarchus believes, that the practice of justice is concerned primarily with bodily and external goods). Given that he calls "good" a person who is just in the ordinary sense (one who does not practice *pleonexia*), and given his recognition that one's "friends" may not be good and some of one's enemies may indeed be good, his definition of justice implied that it could be just to harm good men in order to benefit bad ones, since all that ultimately matters is seizing and enjoying the "good things."

Polemarchus was unwilling to accept this, and proved willing instead to abandon the realities of political life by redefining justice as helping good friends and harming only bad enemies. Justice, as an activity concerned with the acquisition and protection of good things, could be considered unqualifiedly good (and hence a virtue) only if it was in service to a wholly good community, and practiced against a bad one. Only in this manner could one help friends and harm enemies without helping bad men and harming good ones. Pressed even further, he ended up accepting that justice required harming no one—again on the grounds that virtue cannot promote vice.

Had Polemarchus not taken this route, he would have had to recognize, if he had thought clearly about it, that a capable individual lacked sufficient reason to be just in the ordinary sense, since the ultimate basis of this justice is a selfishness—whether individual or collective—not predicated on virtue. Defining justice as helping friends and harming enemies does nothing to avoid this conclusion. A "friend" turns out to be anyone useful

for one's own interests. If one rejects this and strives to be a good citizen, it is not clear whether one is truly being rational and, thus, it is not clear whether this justice truly qualifies as a virtue.

This last consideration draws attention to a remarkable point. Socrates has certainly shaken up Polemarchus' confidence that he knows perfectly well what justice demands (and Polemarchus is willing to face this possibility, unlike his father).¹⁸⁷ One conviction he did *not* challenge, however, was that justice *is* a virtue. The definition of justice has been subordinated to the demand that justice *be* a virtue beneficial to oneself and to those others who seek their good without harming others. (The good that justice is meant to secure remains obscure, however.) Thrasymachus will violently enter the conversation in order to try to bring sense to it by rejecting precisely the assumption that justice is something good for its possessor.

¹⁸⁷ On Socrates' ultimate designs in conversing with Polemarchus, consult Page 1990, esp. pp. 249-258.

Chapter Four:
The Critique of Justice in *Republic*, Book One:
Thrasymachus (336b-354c)

Thrasymachus is the other great critic of justice in the Platonic corpus. In most essential points, his critique of justice overlaps with those of Polus and Callicles. He recognizes that, in ordinary life, the core of justice is the concept of fairness (*to ison*). He also shares with them the same basic understanding of the “good things,” the substance of human happiness: bodily and external goods. He also differs from Polus and Callicles. Unlike Polus, he is unwilling to say that justice is noble or praiseworthy (*kalon*). Unlike Callicles, he does not reject the conception of justice as fairness in the name of some true or natural standard of justice. He treats the conventional understanding of justice as the only one. Also, unlike Callicles, Thrasymachus is never maneuvered into defending an unrestrained, indiscriminate hedonism. Because of these things, Socrates must use different arguments to refute him from those he used against Polus and Callicles. In fact, much of what is important about the exchange between Thrasymachus and Socrates lies in the implications of the arguments that Socrates uses to refute him.

The exchange as a whole has the following form. After Thrasymachus has entered the conversation and been persuaded to offer his definition of justice (336b-338b), the remainder of his discussion with Socrates can be divided into two main parts. The first part (338c-342e) consists of Thrasymachus’ articulation of his definition of justice as “the advantage of the stronger,” and Socrates refutation of it. The second part

(343a-354c) consists of Thrasymachus' reformulation of his position: justice is "someone else's good," and injustice is more personally beneficial than justice (especially the complete injustice of tyranny), followed by Socrates' counter-arguments that justice is virtue and wisdom, more powerful than injustice, and necessary for happiness. The first book of the *Republic* ends with Socrates' admission that his arguments about the value of justice have proven nothing because he has yet to determine the primary question, what justice is (354a-b).

1. Thrasymachus' Entrance (336b-338b)¹⁸⁸

Thrasymachus thrusts himself violently into the conversation and quickly assumes the role of prosecutor.¹⁸⁹ He has been eager for some time to take charge in order to put to an end the foolish "nonsense" (*phluaria*) that Socrates and Polemarchus have been speaking. Like Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of vanity and bad faith in argumentation.¹⁹⁰ Under the pretense of searching for the truth, Socrates induces others to give their opinions (while hiding his own) only to turn around and refute them and thereby achieve his real goal, which is to appear smarter than those he is talking to.¹⁹¹ Thrasymachus challenges Socrates to offer his own opinion. He

¹⁸⁸ Although the drama of Thrasymachus' entrance adds little of substance to the argument between him and Socrates, it resonates with allusions to justice and juridical processes. It sets the tone for the manner in which Socrates and Thrasymachus will treat each other in their dispute, and it sets a standard for judging just how much (and how) Socrates manages by midway through the conversation (at 350d-e) to reduce the angry and imperious Thrasymachus to tame, if grudging, agreement; see Strauss 1964, p. 138 on the significance of this fact.

¹⁸⁹ For interpretations of Thrasymachus' character, see Bosanquet 1895, p. 49, Nettleship 1901, pp. 26-27, Strauss 1964, pp. 74, 77-78, Bloom 1991, pp. 326-27, Guthrie 1969, III: p. 96, and Beversluis 2000, pp. 222-23.

¹⁹⁰ He is clearly familiar with Socrates' mode of argumentation; see 336c, 337a, 337e, 338b, 340d.

¹⁹¹ 336b-c; cf. *Gorgias* 461b-c and 482c-483a, 497b.

forbids him, however, from giving certain answers. Socrates is not allowed to say that justice is the needful (*deon*), or the helpful (*ōphelimon*), or the profitable (*lusiteloun*), or the gainful (*kerdaleon*), or the advantageous (*sumpheron*). Such answers would be “inanities,” and Thrasymachus will accept only a clear and precise answer (336c-d).

Despite his “bestial” behavior (see 336b, d), at first glance Thrasymachus presents himself as a defender of truth and, indeed, of justice. As several commentators have noted, he delivers his accusation of Socrates in the tones of moral indignation, as though he is angered simply by Socrates’ dishonesty.¹⁹² Thrasymachus is not a Callicles, however. As we shall see, he is not denouncing Socrates in the name of (true) justice. He is not really denouncing Socrates for being unjust. It is difficult even to say whether Thrasymachus is truly indignant. On the basis of what Socrates soon says—that Thrasymachus is intellectually vain (338b)—his anger may be merely the frustration of having to sit through so much Socratic nonsense before he had the opportunity to take things over himself. That being the case, the demand that Socrates give his own opinion would not, then, really be a call for Socrates to “play fair,” but rather the set-up for paying Socrates back in his own coin by showing him up. Consequently, he does not lay out his prohibitions concerning the kind of answer he will accept from Socrates out of some disinterested concern for clarity and precision; they are, rather, laid down in order to compel Socrates to give a specific enough answer that Thrasymachus can turn around and “clearly and precisely” refute it.

¹⁹² See Strauss 1964, p. 77 and Stauffer 2001, p. 59.

Socrates does treat Thrasymachus as though he were genuinely morally indignant. Through a couple clever evasions, he is eventually able to avoid giving his own opinion (336d-337a). He asserts that Thrasymachus should not be so harsh, since he and Polemarchus were making an involuntary error, and that they deserve pity for being ignorant of something so precious as justice. Thrasymachus scornfully laughs this off as Socrates' "habitual irony" and claims that he predicted that Socrates would do anything to avoid giving his own opinion.¹⁹³ Socrates responds that Thrasymachus' prediction was "wise," since he should not expect anyone to answer when the answer they might give has been forbidden ahead of time—thereby hinting that one of the forbidden answers somehow reflects his own opinion (cf. 339b).

Thrasymachus then says that he can give a better answer than those he has forbidden, and he asks Socrates what punishment the latter would deserve in that case. (Apparently Socrates is to be punished for being unwilling to deliver an answer that is not forbidden.) Socrates responds that he would deserve to suffer what is fitting (*prosēkei*) for him to suffer: that he, the ignorant one, learn from Thrasymachus, the one who claims to know (337d). (Here, again, we have a play on some notions about justice.) Thrasymachus demands money as well; Glaucon, stepping in for the perpetually penniless Socrates, promises Thrasymachus will receive if he would just answer (337d). Thrasymachus continues to refuse, protesting that this will only enable Socrates to pull off his "usual trick" of not answering and refuting anyone who does; but, after Socrates and the others plead with him some more, he relents, griping once more about Socrates'

¹⁹³ This might perhaps be better translated "habitual shamming," as Vlastos (1991, p. 24) has suggested. For our purposes, it is moot whether or not it is anachronistic to translate *eirōneia* "irony."

injustice, saying that he goes around learning from others without ever rendering thanks—that is, money (337e-338b).

He is not so reluctant to as he might seem, however. Socrates tells us that Thrasyarchus' insistence that Socrates answer was really a pretense. He "evidently desired to speak so that he could win a good reputation, since he believed he had a very fine [or admirable] answer" (338a). Thus, although he has attempted to put Socrates on trial, he is ultimately overpowered by his own vanity (or greed or both; see 337d, 338a).

2. The Advantage of the Stronger (338c-342e)

The first part of Thrasyarchus' and Socrates' exchange can be divided into three parts. In the first (338c-339a), Thrasyarchus offers and explains his definition of justice. In the second (339a-341c), the question of the fallibility of rulers leads to Thrasyarchus' definition of "rulers in the precise sense." In the third (341c-342e), Socrates uses this definition to refute Thrasyarchus' account of justice. This section is primarily important for two reasons. First, Thrasyarchus lays out most of the basic facts on which he bases his definition of justice. We shall see that Socrates does not challenge these facts. Second, the introduction of the notion of rulers in the precise sense is the sole basis on which Socrates refutes Thrasyarchus' definition. From this we can begin to glean what precisely it is about Thrasyarchus' account that Socrates disagrees with. In the process, we also see Thrasyarchus move from a descriptive to a prescriptive meaning of "stronger," revealing what he thinks is truly at stake in the discussion of justice.

2.1. Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice (338c-341c)

After protests and the promise of money, Thrasymachus finally offers his definition of justice. The just, he says, “is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger” (*ouk allo ti ē to tou kreittonos sumpheron*, 338c). Socrates rightly says that this definition is unclear. He asks what Thrasymachus means, offering a possible interpretation that he is sure Thrasymachus would not accept. Surely he does not mean that whatever food is advantageous for the body of Polydamas, the pancratiast, is advantageous and just for those who are weaker than him (338c-d)? Thrasymachus calls Socrates “disgusting” for offering an interpretation obviously meant to put his answer in the worst light possible. Socrates does seem to be baiting Thrasymachus, but his question serves to rule out ahead of time the most literal sense of “stronger”—the physically stronger.¹⁹⁴ More importantly, Socrates provokes Thrasymachus by introducing a notion that the latter will straightaway reject: that what is advantageous for the stronger is also advantageous for the weaker (if beef is good for the stronger, it is good for the weaker). Thrasymachus, like Calicles, will offer an account of justice premised on the irreconcilable interests of classes of human beings, though, as we shall see, his classifications are different from those of Calicles.

To explain himself more precisely, Thrasymachus points to two facts that both he and Socrates agree on. First, different cities are ruled in different ways. Some are tyrannies, some democracies, some aristocracies, and so forth. Each city is under a regime and regimes differ from one another. Second, in each of these cities the ruling

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Gorgias* 488b-489d.

part masters the rest (*touto kratei en hekastēi polei, to archon*, 338d). “[E]ach ruling group,” he continues,

sets down laws for its own advantage; a democracy sets down democratic laws; a tyranny tyrannic laws; and the others do the same. And they declare that what they have set down—their own advantage—is just for the ruled, and the man who departs from it they punish (*kolazousin*) as a breaker of the law and a doer of unjust deeds (*adikounta*). This, best of men, is what I mean: in every city the same thing is just, the advantage of the established ruling body (*to tēs katestēkuias archēs sumpheron*). It surely is master; so the man who reasons rightly concludes that everywhere justice is the same thing, the advantage of the stronger.” (338e-339a)

This speech provides one part of the core of Thrasymachus’ understanding of justice (though it does not contain the whole of it). We see now that by “stronger” he means the ruling class (or person) in the city, the “established ruling body.” Justice is *their* advantage. Note that, with the exception of tyranny, justice is the advantage of the ruling class, but not necessarily in every case the advantage of every member of that class.¹⁹⁵ The individual members of the ruling class are “stronger” by virtue of their membership in that class. They are not necessary “naturally” superior, as they would be in Callicles’ definition (*Gorgias* 491c-d).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Benardete 1989, p. 22 and Irwin 1995, pp. 174-75, 177.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Strauss 1964, p. 87.

It should be clear, then, that Thrasymachus is not trying to give an account here of what people mean when they use the word “justice.”¹⁹⁷ Rather, he begins, like Polus, Callicles, and Cephalus before him, with the premise that there is a common sense identification of the just with the legal: the just is what the law commands.¹⁹⁸ The law is the link between what is called “the just” and the advantage of the stronger. Because the ruling class makes the laws with a view to its own interests, its advantage is the true purpose and effect of the law. He does not claim, however, that this is how people commonly understand the purpose of law or justice. As Kenneth Dorter (2006, pp. 34, 52-53) has rightly indicated, if Thrasymachus thinks he has a “very fine” answer, it is no doubt because he thinks he is revealing that justice, contrary to what it is taken to be, is *in truth* the advantage of the stronger. He is *debunking* justice.¹⁹⁹ Let us look more closely at how he arrives at his definition.

Just as he is not claiming that the word “just” really means “the advantage of the stronger,” he is also not claiming that people take “the just” to mean simply “the lawful” or that they take whatever the law commands to be just simply because it is commanded. The notions of the just and lawful are closely related, but they do not have identical meanings. As he puts it, the rulers say that obeying the laws is just and breaking them is unjust. If the just and the lawful were the same in meaning, this would be a tautology.²⁰⁰ He says that the laws are *represented* (*apephēnan*) as just, not that the just is defined as “whatever the rulers say.” What Thrasymachus is saying is that the laws are taken to be

¹⁹⁷ Nor, it should seem obvious, is he giving a theory of obligation here—that laws should be obeyed *because* they are the advantage of the stronger.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Hourani 1962, pp. 111-13, Strauss 1964, p. 75, Maguire 1971, p. 145.

¹⁹⁹ See Pappas 2003, pp. 39-40 and Stauffer 2001, p. 65.

²⁰⁰ Hadgopoulos 1973, p. 208 seems to have been the first to notice this.

serving a purpose *other* than the advantage of the stronger and it is because they are taken to be serving this *other* purpose that they are taken to be just. The ostensible purpose of the law, we are invited to infer, is the *common* advantage.²⁰¹ Thrasymachus is using the facts of political life (as he sees them) to debunk the claim that the laws serve the common interest.²⁰² The tenor of his speech suggests that, according to Thrasymachus, there is no such thing as a common advantage between ruler and ruled.²⁰³ This will be borne out.

Finally, we see that Thrasymachus has in common with Callicles the claim that justice is essentially a fraud. Thrasymachus presupposes the same natural egoism that Callicles did. In both cases the just and the lawful are presented as serving some end other than what they truly serve.

Callicles' and Thrasymachus' definitions of justice, for all their similarities, differ most obviously when it comes to *whose* interests justice serves.²⁰⁴ For Callicles, justice is the advantage of the weaker; for Thrasymachus, that of the stronger. This difference is not as great as it appears, however. Callicles used "stronger" to denote the naturally

²⁰¹ See Stauffer 2001, p. 65. This would not be true in the case of the tyrant, of course. The commands of tyrants are paradigmatically unjust. This fact does not undermine Thrasymachus' definition, however, precisely because he is trying to show that the laws in other regimes, which are certainly still commands of the ruling body, are in principle and in intent no different from a tyrant's commands.

²⁰² That, no doubt, is why he forbade Socrates to define the just by reference to advantage, yet does so himself (as Socrates soon mentions, 339a-b). Socrates will not be allowed to slip in the notion that justice is simply advantageous for all concerned.

²⁰³ See Strauss 1964, p. 76, Bloom 1991, p. 328, and Barney 2004, sect. 2. Stauffer (2001, p. 67) points out that Thrasymachus seems to entirely ignore the fact that rulers, in order to solidify their rule, must of necessity make laws are at least in some minimal sense also for the advantage of the ruled. Otherwise the city would collapse. Irwin (1995, p. 175), to the contrary, asserts that Thrasymachus assumes this in his definition. There is a difference between the immediate and the ultimate beneficiaries of a just order. Irwin is certainly right that Thrasymachus' definition ought to presuppose this, but Stauffer is right that Thrasymachus, in his eagerness to debunk the goodness of justice, entirely ignores this dimension of justice.

²⁰⁴ For a general comparison of Thrasymachus and Callicles, Weiss 2007, pp. 93-96 is an excellent place to start.

superior, and strength was a property of individuals, the product of their superior virtue. It was their superior virtue which equipped and entitled them to rule the many.

Thrasymachus (for now, at least) is using “stronger” in a strictly political sense. The stronger refers collectively to the group that holds sway over the city, making the laws and enforcing them. As noted, not every member of this class need be “stronger” in Callicles’ sense. Hence, Thrasymachus’ notion of “the advantage of the stronger” is perfectly compatible with Callicles’ notion of “the advantage of the weaker” when the former’s definition is applied to democracies.²⁰⁵ In fact, Callicles’ account of the conventional understanding of justice seems especially appropriate to democracies and less so to other regimes. In this respect, Thrasymachus’ definition is more precise.

One might wonder why Thrasymachus, unlike Callicles, does not invoke the distinction between nature and convention. The self-interest that is the basis for the laws made by the ruling class is not itself a product of those laws. It is natural. Further, the laws are emphatically the product of the will of the ruling body; as such they are emphatically conventional. In addition, he has implied that, for the ruled, obeying the laws will not necessarily be in their own self-interest. Without the commands of the rulers, it is highly doubtful that the ruled would spontaneously serve the interests of the ruling class. It is not, it seems, good by nature for them to be law-abiding at all times. Thrasymachus has everything he needs to present an opposition between nature (as self-interest) and law, but he does not do so.

²⁰⁵ We will see that their definitions are even more compatible, insofar as Thrasymachus clearly supposes that “justice” at its core means fairness or equality (*to ison*); see section 3.1.

The simplest explanation for this fact is that Thrasymachus has no need to do so. Callicles invoked the distinction in the first place in order to explain a contradiction within common opinion that Socrates had stealthily used to his advantage. Thrasymachus certainly thinks that Socrates has been encouraging Pollyannaish opinions about justice, but his own debunking of these opinions does not require that he invoke nature. The just and the lawful are identified, and the law is in the interest of the ruling class. That is all he need say. More importantly, he is not opposing a standard of natural justice to justice as it is commonly practiced. Thrasymachus is so thoroughly a conventionalist that he takes justice to be wholly the product of law, with no basis in nature. That is, paradoxically, the implication of the fact that he sees no need even to invoke the opposition between the two. The just is the advantage of the stronger, imposed by the stronger. Period.²⁰⁶

Once Thrasymachus has given his definition, Socrates seeks further clarification. Thrasymachus has defined justice as the advantage of the stronger, but he has also said that it is just to obey the rulers, since he equated following the law with obeying the rulers (339b). He does not contradict Thrasymachus' claim that the rulers in the cities rule in their own self-interest.²⁰⁷ Rather, he begins by gaining Thrasymachus' ready agreement that rulers in the city are not infallible. Intending to make laws to their own advantage, the rulers sometimes inadvertently put down laws that are not to their own advantage (339b-c). Measured against their intention, the laws are sometimes "correct,"

²⁰⁶ See also Strauss 1964, p. 86.

²⁰⁷ See 347d; cf. Bloom 1991, p. 328.

sometimes “incorrect.”²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the ruled are obligated to follow all of the rulers’ commands, both the correct and the incorrect ones. Hence, since the rulers sometimes correctly put down laws to their own advantage and sometimes accidentally incorrectly put down laws to their *dis*advantage, and since it is just to obey the rulers in both cases, it follows that justice is both the advantage of the stronger and its opposite, the disadvantage of the stronger. Thrasymachus’ initial definition was inadequate (339b-e).

Thrasymachus seems genuinely stumped by this objection at first, and Socrates explains it again. This seems strange, since the objection is so obvious. Socrates has latched onto a genuine weakness in Thrasymachus’ definition, if that definition is intended to apply literally and universally to all laws. The objection is so obvious that, while Thrasymachus is apparently searching for a response, Polemarchus bursts in to affirm Socrates’ good point (340a-b). Cleitophon disputes this, saying that, when Thrasymachus had declared justice to be the advantage of the stronger, he meant that justice is “what the stronger *believes* to be his advantage” (340b, italics mine). This is set down in law, and the ruled are commanded to obey it. Although we will see that Thrasymachus rejects Cleitophon’s emendation, it obviously reflects what Thrasymachus had been describing.²⁰⁹ The rulers intend to benefit themselves through their commands.

²⁰⁸ Socrates and Thrasymachus agree in calling “correct” the laws that are in the interest of the ruler, and “incorrect” those that, against their intention, do not serve their advantage. (It is not clear whether the rulers’ mistakes are about means or ends or both, but it is safest to assume that they are about both.) This should be enough to show that Thrasymachus is *not* giving some general normative theory about obligation, that anyone truly has the duty (independent of political coercion) to follow a law because it is in the interest of the ruling class.

²⁰⁹ For arguments that Thrasymachus *should* accept the emendation, see Joseph 1935, p. 17, and Cross and Woosley 1964, p. 46. For arguments that say he should *not*, see Henderson 1970, p. 224, and Annas 1981, pp. 41-42.

What they enshrine in law is what they *believe* will benefit them. Nonetheless, they are fallible and do not always succeed.²¹⁰

When Polemarchus protests that Thrasymachus did not say what Cleitophon claims, Socrates once again takes the reins of the conversation, saying that he will accept this revision if Thrasymachus wishes to make it. Thrasymachus, however, emphatically rejects Cleitophon's revision. He denies that he would ever call someone "stronger" (*kreittō*) at the very moment when he is making his mistakes. When Socrates interjects that that seemed to be precisely what he *was* doing when he admitted that rulers are not infallible, Thrasymachus charges Socrates with sycophancy.²¹¹ It was obvious, he implies, that that was not what he meant and that Socrates is taking it that way only to do harm to the argument (340b-d).

As Thrasymachus explains it, no possessor of knowledge or skill, insofar as he possesses that skill, makes mistakes (340d-341a). He reasons that a person deserves to have a particular skill or kind of knowledge attributed to him only when he actively possesses that skill or knowledge and correctly implements it. When that person makes mistakes, he does not do so *as a result of that knowledge*; rather, as Thrasymachus states it, "The man who makes mistakes makes them on account of a failure in knowledge and in that respect is no craftsman" (340e). Hence, insofar as a title such as "doctor" implies medical knowledge, in precise speech a person should not be called a doctor at the

²¹⁰ Cleitophon is *not* being a relativist here, asserting that what the rulers believe advantageous *is* advantageous *because they consider it so*. He is, after all, explaining why human fallibility is compatible with Thrasymachus' definition—not explaining why the rulers are infallible.

²¹¹ The charge of sycophancy is disingenuous here (but cf. 340d, 341a-b), but it is consistent with his genuine beliefs regarding Socrates' method of argumentation; see references at fn. 4. Still, at the moment he is saving face.

moment when he is making a mistake or failing to apply that knowledge. It is merely a loose manner of speaking when we say, “the doctor made a mistake.” What we mean is that the person who normally makes use of medical knowledge at this moment apparently failed to apply that knowledge (or that the person who normally is a doctor at that moment was not acting as a doctor should). The same line of reasoning applies with any other skill or kind of knowledge or wisdom: grammar, mathematics, calculation, and so forth. “Hence,” Thrasymachus asserts, “insofar as [a craftsman] is what we address him as, [he] never makes mistakes,” and “in precise speech...none of the craftsmen makes mistakes” (340e). Consequently, “no craftsman, wise man, or ruler makes mistakes at the moment when he is ruling,” and “the ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, does not make mistakes; and not making mistakes, he sets down what is best for himself. And this must be done by the man who is ruled.” Therefore, once again, justice is the advantage of the stronger (340e-341a).

Thrasymachus’ charge of sycophancy, we can see, was a face-saving gesture. He salvages his position by redefining what he means by “stronger.” Before, he had freely admitted that the rulers make mistakes (339c); in saying this, he clearly implied that, for all that, they were still rulers. They may have revealed that they are not qualified to rule (by Thrasymachus’ standards), but they still factually held power.²¹² Now he is changing the meaning of ruler so that he can still maintain that his definition is correct. In addition, “stronger” had before been predicated of a ruling body and of individuals by virtue of their participation in that body. Now he is emphatically applying it to individuals. He is

²¹² Cf. Benardete 1989, p. 23; compare Stauffer 2001, p. 71.

now talking about who *deserves* to be called stronger.²¹³ This implies that he is not changing the definition *merely* to save face. He is now talking about the kind of men he considers genuinely worthy of admiration, people who really know what they are doing. Virtue, for Thrasymachus, consists essentially in the capacity to serve one's own advantage, and this necessarily requires good judgment.²¹⁴

The crucial step in his new formulation of “rulers in the precise sense” is his equating of the craftsman (*dēmiourgos*), the wise man (*sophos*), and the ruler (*archōn*) (340e). He proceeds on the assumption that political rule is an art like any other; hence he can apply his reasoning to rulers just as much as to artisans. It is Thrasymachus who invokes the arts analogy, not Socrates (unlike in the conversation with Polemarchus).²¹⁵ This is entirely appropriate for a professional teacher of rhetoric, since he claims to confer precisely the art that allows one to rule.²¹⁶ We will see, however, that the equating of ruling with an art will shortly get in him into trouble. At 340e he had indirectly invited Socrates to consider all arts as different kinds of rule. Hence, as we shall see, while Thrasymachus has argued on the premise that ruling is an art, Socrates will argue on the premise that art is rule.

2.2. Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice (341c-342e)

²¹³ In this way he moves somewhat closer to Callicles' definition of the stronger.

²¹⁴ As Nettleship (1901, p. 27) puts it, the core of Thrasymachus' position is that “the real art of living is to know how to aggrandize oneself (*pleonektein*) with impunity”; cf. Bloom 1991, pp. 329-30, and Kerferd 1981, p. 121.

²¹⁵ Cf. Allan 1993, pp. 26-27, and Strauss 1964, p. 80.

²¹⁶ As Bloom (1991, p. 330) points out.

With the introduction of the notion of rulers in the precise sense, the focus of the conversation changes. Socrates does not dispute the facts upon which Thrasymachus initially based his definition (the self-interest of the ruling class); rather, he disputes Thrasymachus' claim that a ruler in the precise sense rules for his own advantage—or that the practice of any art aims intrinsically at the advantage of the artisan. There would seem to be no art of pursuing one's own good. And this raises the question how one comes to have knowledge of what is advantageous for oneself. Thus, we see here another version of Socrates' strategy of shifting the conversation from the facts about justice in ordinary life to the more comprehensive question of the human good—what it is and how one discerns it. This maneuver is appropriate since Thrasymachus, like Callicles and Polus before him, criticizes justice precisely because it is not good (for the just man). Socrates' method of proceeding serves to reveal the questionable assumption upon which this criticism is based: that they know what the human good is.²¹⁷ (Thrasymachus, however, is never forced as Callicles is to articulate what the good is.)

After a further hostile (or insulting) exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus (341a-c), Socrates begins his cross-examination by clarifying what it means to be an artisan “in the precise sense” (341c-d). A doctor, for example, is called a doctor not insofar as he makes money by practicing medicine, but only insofar as he is a healer of sick people. The proper product of medicine is health, not money. Furthermore, a pilot is called a pilot not because he sails in a ship (though he does), but because he is the ruler of the other sailors. In both cases, the art in question involves

²¹⁷ Cf. Bloom 1991, p. 328.

giving orders to other human beings in order to bring about some result, and the artisan in the precise sense is the one who correctly gives orders to that end. Thus, starting with Thrasyarchus' suggestion that rule is a kind of art, Socrates moves via arts that involve giving commands to the position that all arts are kinds of rule.

Socrates next establishes that each art pursues only the advantage (*sumpheron*) of that which it rules, not its own advantage (341d-342d). This passage is ambiguous and confusing and, thus, difficult to interpret. It chiefly works through a sleight of hand by which Socrates identifies the artisan with his art. Socrates begins by asking two ambiguous questions. Having established that a doctor in the precise sense is one who cares for the sick and that a pilot in the precise sense is one who rules sailors, he asks Thrasyarchus whether "there [is] something advantageous for each of them" (*hekastōi toutōn...ti sumpheron*). Thrasyarchus agrees that there is.²¹⁸ Following this, Socrates next asks whether the art in question is "naturally directed toward seeking and providing for the advantage of each" (*tōi to sumpheron hekastōi*, 341d).²¹⁹ Again, Thrasyarchus agrees. Since it does not seem credible that Thrasyarchus could believe that medicine was established for the sake of doctors (see 340d, 341e) or piloting for the sake of pilots, Thrasyarchus is most likely agreeing that medicine is practiced for the sake of the sick, and that piloting is practiced, if not for the sake of the sailors, at least for the sake of whoever has an interest in seeing the ship safely to port. It should not be considered

²¹⁸ Although the referent of "each" in this question is ambiguous, this ambiguity is not important for the argument. Any conceivable party has "something advantageous." For interpretations of this question, see Bosanquet 1895, p. 52, and Stauffer 2001, p. 73 n. 19.

²¹⁹ Socrates uses the singular here: "And isn't the art...naturally directed toward seeking and providing for the advantage of each" (341d)? The phrasing suggests that the "each" of the previous question ("Is there something advantageous for each of them?") did not have, as its referent, the arts of medicine or piloting.

surprising that Thrasymachus admits that these arts are not practiced solely for the artisan's advantage, since he has never claimed otherwise. Strictly speaking, he has claimed only that the art of political rule is practiced for the sake of the ruler.²²⁰

Having established these things, Socrates next asks the puzzling question, "is there any advantage for each of the arts other than to be as perfect [or complete] as possible" (341d)? Asked to clarify, Socrates explains that medicine, for example, was invented to remedy bodily defects, and so provides for what is advantageous for the body (341e). Socrates asks whether medicine itself (or any other art) is also defective and in need of some other art (or "supplementary virtue") in order to provide what is advantageous for it. If so, the process would go on *ad infinitum*, each remedial art in need of its own remedial art which in turn is in need of *its* own remedial art, and so on. Or, Socrates proposes, is it the case that each art, in addition to serving the advantage of that over which it is set, also take care for its own advantage? Or, finally, is each art, insofar as it is what it is, perfect and not defective at all, "itself without blemish or taint because it is correct so long as it is precisely and wholly what it is" (342b)?

This last account of the arts is a rendition of the implicit premise of Thrasymachus' notion of "rulers or craftsmen in the precise sense" (cf. 340d-341a). If a craftsman, insofar as he is truly a craftsman, is infallible, this implies that the craft (or art, *technē*) which he possesses is infallible.²²¹ Otherwise one could make a mistake despite

²²⁰ Even here we see a subtle but important difference between the art of rule and other arts. Strictly speaking, medicine would be the knowledge of health and of how to produce it. Thrasymachus certainly presents the art of rule as knowledge of how to make laws and order people in order to produce one's own good, but he has not said that the art of the rule is the source of the knowledge of one's own good.

²²¹ Otherwise put, since art is knowledge, and knowledge is always true (unlike opinion, which may be true or false), the art is always correct and, hence, infallible.

perfectly applying the art one has learned. Even if this were not so, Socrates' last account of the arts is certainly the most congenial notion to Thrasyarchus' idea of "rulers in the precise sense." It is not surprising, then, that Thrasyarchus agrees to this last option. Arts do not need other arts to look to their own advantage, nor do arts look to their own advantage; rather, insofar as an art is what it is, it is perfect and complete and without defect (342b).

This argument is strange nonetheless. While it is immediately intelligible to speak of the advantage of an artisan, it seems figurative at best to talk about the advantage of an art, since arts exist to serve certain interests but are not themselves beings with interests.²²² It seems that Thrasyarchus understands Socrates to be asking whether an art, to be an art, is sufficient to achieve its aim; he is not thinking of the art as an entity with its own interests which it may or may not seek. As we shall see, Socrates at this point has begun (deliberately) to conflate the artisan with his art and, therefore, the end produced by the art with the purpose for which an artisan practices that art.²²³

Since an art has no advantage beyond being itself, Socrates concludes (and Thrasyarchus concurs) that medicine attends not to the advantage of medicine but to that of bodies; and that horsemanship looks to the advantage of horses, and not to that of horsemanship; and, in general, that no "other art consider[s] its own advantage—for it doesn't have any further need to—but the advantage of that of which it is the art" (342c). But, Socrates adds, "the arts rule and are masters of (*archousi...kai kratousi*) that of which they are the arts" (342c). Socrates tells us that Thrasyarchus agreed, but only

²²² Rosen (2005, pp. 45-46) is especially emphatic on this point.

²²³ See Nettleship 1901, p. 30, Rosen 2005, p. 48, and Barney 2006, p. 49.

with “a great deal of resistance,” which means that Thrasymachus has finally begun to perceive that his argument is about to be refuted.

While it appeared figurative at best to speak of arts having an “advantage,” it seems simply false to claim that every art seeks only the advantage of the object upon which it is exercised or the product it produces. This is perhaps the most heavily criticized step in Socrates’ argument.²²⁴ One need only replace Socrates’ examples with others such as architecture or farming (cf. 333a) or, as Thrasymachus shortly will, with shepherding. In all (or almost all) of these cases one easily distinguish between the object or product of the art and the person (or entity) whose advantage the art serves.

Completing his line of reasoning, Socrates asserts that, since the arts rule and are master over their subject; and since they thus are “stronger” than their subject (by Thrasymachus’ previous way of speaking, see 338e-339a, 340e-341a); and since, therefore, the subject of each art is the “weaker” with respect to that art, Socrates concludes that “there is no kind of knowledge that considers or commands the advantage of the stronger, but rather of what is weaker and ruled by it” (342c-d). Thrasymachus again agrees, but only after resistance.²²⁵ Socrates reminds Thrasymachus that they had already agreed (at 341c) that a doctor “in the precise sense,” does not consider his own advantage but rather that of his patients. He is “a ruler of bodies” and not “a money-maker” (342d).²²⁶ Likewise, a pilot in the precise sense is a ruler of sailors, and

²²⁴ See Joseph 1935, pp. 21-23, Allan 1993, p. 28, Kerferd 1947, p. 22, Henderson 1970, pp. 226-27, Irwin 1977, p. 181, Johnson 2005, pp. 148-49 for a sample.

²²⁵ Evidently, at this point Socrates is abridging the conversation by leaving out protests or questions from Thrasymachus.

²²⁶ Most narrowly construed, Socrates is saying that money is not the proper product of medicine, nor does any application of medical knowledge directly produce money nor it is aimed at producing money.

commands for their benefit, not his own. Again, Thrasymachus agrees with resistance (342d-e). Socrates finally concludes, “Therefore...there isn’t ever anyone who holds any position of rule, insofar as he is ruler, who considers or commands his own advantage rather than that of what is ruled and of which he himself is the craftsman; and it is looking to this and what is advantageous and fitting for it that he says everything he says and does everything he does” (342e). As Socrates says to his listeners, Thrasymachus’ argument has been “turned around in the opposite direction” (343a): justice is the advantage of the weaker.

Now, the only plausible conclusion that Socrates’ argument would allow us to draw is that the advantage of the practitioner of an art is always only accidentally related to the product of his art. As Bosanquet (1895, p. 53) put it, “The object of a craft is generic, not personal.”²²⁷ Socrates has been able to draw his more radical conclusion (every ruler selflessly rules for the sake of those he rules) because of two tricks. First, as we have already noted, he has conflated the art with the artisan. If the art does not have its own advantage as its object, then the artisan, in practicing his art, does not have his own advantage in view. Reasoning in this way, Socrates is able to ignore the question of the motive that leads an artisan to practice his art, even though one must ask why anyone would bother being an artisan at all if Socrates is correct. Socrates will say more about this shortly (see 345b-347a).

Socrates’ second trick is to treat the products or objects of an art as the only other beings whose advantage could be at stake in the practice of an art (a trick aided by

²²⁷ See also Joseph 1935, pp. 20-23.

Socrates' choice of examples). In that case, since the art (or artisan) does not practice the art for its own advantage, it must do so for that upon which or towards which he works. In this way, Socrates is able to use the equations "art = ruler" and "object of art = ruled," along with "ruler = stronger" and "ruled = weaker," to conclude that every ruler rules for the sake of the ruled.

Even if one were to correct the second trick and maintain Bosanquet's above-mentioned interpretation, Socrates' argument still would not be satisfactory. As D. J. Allan (1993, pp. 98-99) has argued, it still remains the case that an art is only practiced for the advantage of its recipient (who would only accidentally be the same as the practitioner) when the practice of that art is not corrupted by the self-interest of the artisan. The art supplies the capacity to produce a certain product, but it does not itself determine when that capacity should be used, nor does it prohibit the dishonest use of that capacity (remember 333e-334b).²²⁸ As we would say today, the arts are "morally neutral."²²⁹ Consequently, Socrates seems to be repeating here a questionable move he previously made in conversation with Polemarchus: he is discussing justice as though it were wholly a matter of knowledge. By leaving out the motive of the artisan in practicing his art, he ignores the place of intentions in guiding the practice of an art (or

²²⁸ Benardete 1989, p. 23 and Stauffer 2001, pp. 78-79 have suggested that this point confirms that Thrasymachus should never have agreed (at 341e-342b) that the arts are correct so long as they are wholly what they are. They take Socrates to be indicating indirectly the difference between each particular art with its particular end and the comprehensive art of the human good that orders and guides the practice of all the particular arts. Thrasymachus ignores the dependence that particular arts have on this general one. This may be true, but I am not sure. Even though an art cannot by itself determine the end for which its product or practice should be used (for instance, whether or not to heal a particular person), this does not affect the question whether that art is capable of producing that end. As I read the passage, only this latter question is under consideration at 341e-342b, and Thrasymachus would be correct to say that each art is correct (in this sense) insofar as it is what it is—knowledge of how (not whether or when) to produce that end.

²²⁹ Cf. Pappas 2003, p. 43 for one version of this claim.

any other human activity). In this way, the advantage of the ruled appears the automatic consequence of the practice of an art. Socrates practically defines away the concept of self-interest, which had been crucial to Thrasymachus' debunking of the motives of political rulers.

Even though Socrates' arguments are, therefore, invalid on their face, they have served a purpose: namely, calling attention to the art or knowledge that Thrasymachus has presupposed but said nothing about. This is the knowledge of the human good, or the art of living well. As Stauffer (2001, pp. 78-79) has argued, only this art would bear an essential relation to the good of its practitioner, and in the case of this art the difference between the knowledge contained in the art and the motive for practicing it would be irrelevant. The corrupt (as opposed to erroneous) practice of arts is almost always the product of self-interest; but in the case of the art of the human good, self-interest would always motivate its correct practice. If there is such a thing as a common good, then the pursuit of one's own good would dictate, purely by self-interest, that one pursue (or at least refrain from frustrating) the good of others.

As we have seen, Thrasymachus' account of "rulers in the precise sense" shows that he believes that the correct or rational practice of the art of rule presupposes knowledge of the human good; but he has not said how one attains that knowledge. He thinks it is obvious, as we said. Socrates has implicitly called his assurance into question, which will provoke Thrasymachus to say more openly what goods a truly intelligent person would pursue, by what means, and how he would regard the interests of others. In this way Thrasymachus will be moved to criticize justice more blatantly. This is a logical

direction to take the conversation because one must have knowledge of the human good in order to know how to pursue it, and only then can one determine how (or to what extent) the pursuit of one's own good requires justice or injustice.

3. The Critique of Justice (343a-354c)

The first part of the exchange between Socrates and Thrasymachus presented a curious spectacle, with Thrasymachus arguing that rulers are wholly self-interested and Socrates that rulers are wholly selfless. In the process of refuting Thrasymachus, Socrates had been able to use the notion of the "ruler in the precise sense" to call into question the relationship between knowledge and the good of the knower and, thus, to raise the question how one comes to knowledge of one's own advantage, and how the demands of justice are related to one's own good. The question, that is, is what good the truly wise or prudent man pursues.

Thrasymachus has been implying all along that justice serves only the advantage of the rulers, but he does not deliver an explicit critique of justice until after Socrates' first refutation, with its implication that political rulers are always concerned wholly with the good of those they rule. Thrasymachus responds to this implication by reaffirming that rulers are bent on the exploitation of the ruled and by saying more generally that justice is foolish and personally harmful, while injustice, if successful and "perfect," is wise and personally beneficial (343a-344c). The remainder of their conversation consists of Socrates' refutations of Thrasymachus' claims (344d-354c). Socrates's response divides into four parts. First (344c-347e), Socrates proves once again (in a slightly

different manner, but with a significantly different emphasis) that no ruler in the precise sense considers his own advantage.²³⁰ Following this, Socrates refutes Thrasymachus' praise of injustice and condemnation of justice in three steps, proving, first, that justice, not injustice, is virtue and wisdom (347e-350c); second, that justice is mightier (*ischuroteron*) than injustice (350c-352d); and, finally, that "the just...live better (*ameinon zōsin*) than the unjust and are happier (*eudaimonesterōi*, 352d) (352d-354a). In the course of this argument, Thrasymachus ceases to put up resistance to Socrates.²³¹ Nonetheless, Socrates concludes by noting that his arguments have proven nothing for him, since he has proven things *about* justice without having yet determined *what* justice *is* (354a-c).

3.1. Thrasymachus' Critique of Justice (343a-344c)

The thrust of Thrasymachus' speech is to insist that Socrates is mistaken both regarding the true motives of rulers and regarding the true effects of being just. He begins with his attempt to enlighten Socrates regarding the true nature of sheep and shepherds. By Socrates' previous argument, one would have to conclude that a shepherd, as shepherd, cares for nothing other than the good of his sheep; but this is manifestly false. There would be no art of caring for sheep were it not for the desire to use sheep and their products for human advantage.²³² Shepherds and cowherds look after and

²³⁰ This is the step in his argument that I have referred to as a "half-step," since it is partly merely a restatement of his argument at 341c-342e. As we shall, it is not identical.

²³¹ See 350d-e. In this, as in many other respects, his behavior and demeanor resembles that of Callicles.

²³² Again we have the difference, ignored by Socrates, between the immediate product of an art and the ultimate motive that leads someone to practice it; see Kerferd 1947, p. 22, and Cross and Woosley 1964, pp. 48-49.

fatten their stock solely with a view to their own good and the good of their masters (343b).²³³ The case is no different with rulers in the city, who regard the ruled the same way shepherds regard their sheep, thinking of nothing but how to exploit them (343b). Through the invocation of shepherding, Thrasy-machus appears to undermine Socrates' previous line of reasoning by pointing to arts that quite clearly do *not* concern themselves with the good of their objects. That being the case, there is no obstacle to maintaining that political rule is an art of exploitation practiced for the sake of the ruler.

Thrasy-machus then expands on his claim, saying that

justice and the just are really someone else's good (*allotrion agathon*), the advantage of the man who is stronger and rules, and a personal harm to the man who obeys and serves. Injustice is the opposite, and it rules the truly simple (*tōn hōs alēthōs euēthikōn*) and just; and those who are ruled do what is advantageous for him who is stronger, and they make him whom they serve happy but themselves not at all. (343c-d)

To prove that "the just man everywhere has less than the unjust man" (343d) and that justice is truly "someone else's good," he gives four examples of instances where the just man is worse off than the unjust man on account of his justice: contracts, taxes, public distributions, and political office (343d-e). The unjust man will cheat his just contractual partner; he will contrive to pay less than his fair share of taxes and to receive more than his fair share of distributions. The just man, holding political office, will not

²³³ Note that Thrasy-machus temporarily distinguishes between the good of the shepherd and the good of his master; see Strauss 1964, pp. 81-82 for one interpretation of this. Nonetheless, in the very next sentence Thrasy-machus effectively erases the distinction.

act as the unjust man, embezzling revenues and practicing favoritism; instead, as a result of his devotion and impartiality, he will be forced to neglect his own personal affairs and will alienate family and friends on account of his unwillingness to practice favoritism.

This part of Thrasymachus' speech is important in its own right and should be considered before moving on to his praise for tyranny. To say that justice is someone else's good is not, at first glance, the same as saying that justice is the advantage of the rulers.²³⁴ (Consider the example he mentions of the just office holder: he does not advance his own interest in ruling, yet Thrasymachus presents him as an example of a just man.) What, then, is Thrasymachus trying to say about what justice is? The most plausible explanation (suggested by, among others, Boter 1986) is that Thrasymachus has another definition or conception of justice in mind, one compatible with both his claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger and his claim that it is someone else's good. The link between these two conceptions is the conception of the just as the lawful and, in particular, with the notion of justice as fairness (*to ison*). In each example of the just man having less, one sees a person who subordinates his own self-interest to considerations of fairness or impartiality or legality. The law is supposed to be an impartial standard imposing fair limitations on each party's pursuit of its self-interest. The law is intended to restrain the pursuit of "getting the better" (*pleonexia*). So the just man has less than the unjust man because he refrains from taking more than his fair share, while the unjust man does not. Hence, as we have seen many times, the just man does not immediately

²³⁴ The literature is extensive on the question whether "the advantage of the stronger" and "someone else's good" are compatible definitions. Kerferd 1947 set the debate going; it has been continued by Hourani 1962, Kerferd 1964, Harrison 1967, Henderson 1970, Maguire 1971, Nicholson 1974, Kerferd 1981, Annas 1981, Boter 1986, Chappell 1993, and Irwin 1995. My interpretation is closest to that of Boter 1986.

benefit from his justice; the recipient of his act does; at the same time, injustice is immediately beneficial, since it consists in taking more of some good thing than one otherwise could get. Hence, for Thrasymachus, too, the fundamental definition of justice is fairness.

This interpretation receives support from Thrasymachus' examples of injustice (343d-e, 344a-b). In all of these cases, he is speaking of "getting the better" in the sense of taking more than one's fair share, especially by taking what belongs to others. Thus, injustice is *pleonexia*. (In which case, the opposite of injustice would be having one's fair share.) If "the advantage of the stronger" were meant literally as a definition of justice, however, then injustice, as the opposite of justice, would be "the disadvantage of the stronger" (or "the advantage of the weaker," on the apparent assumption that the interests of ruler and ruled are opposed and irreconcilable). Hence, *to ison* is the more fundamental notion of justice, and "getting the better" the more fundamental notion of injustice.

If Thrasymachus understands justice fundamentally as fairness, one can still explain why he presents "the advantage of the stronger" as his definition. Thrasymachus is saying that justice is a fraud (as we already mentioned), and this fraud is perpetrated through the laws and commands of the rulers. For all practical purposes, it is the law that determines what is fair, since it determines what is owed to whom and what are punishable or remedial offenses. The law, in its turn, is determined by the ruling class—and, according to Thrasymachus, in their interest. Thus, as we remarked before, the

rulers inscribe their own interest within the laws, while they present the laws to the ruled as fair and obligatory.

It is true, of course, that much of what counts as fair will be the same in any regime, as some scholars have noted.²³⁵ The examples of injustice that Thrasymachus offers would be recognized as such in any regime: murder, theft, breaking a contract, embezzlement. What *does* vary from regime to regime is the basic distribution of power, privilege, and property. Justice is the advantage of the stronger to the extent that this fundamental distribution is designed to maintain the ruling class in its position of rule, with the attendant benefits. One requirement for keeping the ruling class in power is, of course, that they have a city to rule, which means they must keep order. Hence, many of the rules regulating the life of the citizenry will be the same from regime to regime because they are necessary for peaceful and production cooperation.

In sum, Thrasymachus' two "definitions" of justice (as the advantage of the stronger and as someone else's good) are compatible with one another because both presuppose that the true definition of justice is "fairness" (*to ison*) and that, in political life, it is the law that determines what is fair. Injustice, fundamentally, is seeking to "get the better" (*pleonexia*) of others. Justice is a form of self-limitation, out of respect for what is owed others, in the pursuit of one's own good. Thrasymachus, therefore, has the same fundamental conception of the meaning of justice that Polus, Callicles, and Polemarchus had before him.

²³⁵ For example, Nicholson 1974, pp. 215-218-19, and Pappas 2003, p. 44.

To prove without doubt “how much more to [a person’s] private advantage (*sumpherei idiāi*) the unjust is than the just” (344a), Thrasymachus continues his speech by bidding Socrates to turn his attention to the most perfect or complete specimen of injustice: the tyrant (344a-c).²³⁶ He is the man who is “able to get the better in a big way.”²³⁷ Tyranny renders its possessor “most happy” (*eudaimonestaton*) and its victims “most wretched” (*athliōtatos*; cf. *Gorgias* 471c). The tyrant is not “completely unjust” in the sense that he never does anything just;²³⁸ he is called completely unjust on account of the scale and the impunity of his injustices. The tyrant practices injustice on the largest scale and with the fewest restrictions, and he is not subject to punishment. Thrasymachus therefore distinguishes tyrants from common criminals, whom he labels “partially unjust” men. They are only partially unjust both because the crimes they commit are small relative to that of the tyrant and because they are often caught, reproached, and punished. By contrast, instead of stealing the property of one or a few people, as a common thief does, the tyrant steals everything from everybody at the same time; and, because of his power, this injustice goes unpunished. What is more remarkable, while common criminals get called “shameful names,” the successful tyrant is declared to be blessed and happy both by his subjects and others.²³⁹ According to Thrasymachus, no one (except perhaps some simple-minded fools) genuinely and impartially disapproves of injustice.

²³⁶ Here, then, Thrasymachus follows the same maneuver that Polus did; see *Gorgias* 466b-c and 471a-d.

²³⁷ Or, to follow our previous translation, he is the one who is “greatly able to have more” (*ton megala dunamenon pleonektein*, 344a)—idiomatically, the one who has great power to benefit himself at the expense of others.

²³⁸ Contrary to Irwin’s (1995, pp. 177-78) interpretation.

²³⁹ This should be compared with Polus’ account of Archelaus at *Gorgias* 471a-d. Note that Thrasymachus does not say that tyrants are praised. They are congratulated for their happy state, but he does not say they are called noble or virtuous. This recalls the common if rarely acknowledged distinction between the good and the noble; see *Gorgias* 474c-d.

Those who blame injustice do so hypocritically and for self-defense. They denounce injustice publicly, not because they truly think it something bad, but because they fear others might do it to them; they use blame to deter them from doing so.²⁴⁰

From all of this, Thrasymachus concludes that “injustice, when it comes into being on sufficient scale, is mightier, freer, and more masterful (*ischuroteron kai eleutheriōteron kai despotikōteron*) than justice; and, as [he has] said from the beginning, [that] the just is the advantage of the stronger, and the unjust is what is profitable and advantageous to oneself” (344c).

Thrasymachus has now revealed the core of his position. We have seen it before. The fundamental meaning of justice is fairness. The concern for justice requires self-limitation in one’s pursuit of well-being, requiring that one respect the property and the bodies of others. (Thrasymachus, like the others before him, takes it for granted that the “good things” are obvious and that they are precisely the kinds of things that the law exists to protect—that is, primarily bodily and external goods.)²⁴¹ But the more one has of those good things (and the more power one has to secure them), the better off one is. Beyond a certain point, to acquire these things one must take them from others.²⁴² Hence, having more at the expense of others (*pleonexia*) is inherently profitable. Being just is profitable only in those cases where one cannot commit injustice successfully. Hence, tyrants are happiest of all because they can commit the greatest injustices while

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Gorgias* 492a-b, 483b-484a.

²⁴¹ Cf. Johnson 2005, pp. 140-41 n. 8. Indeed, Thrasymachus discusses the good almost entirely in terms of wealth; see 343d-344b; cf. Nicholson 1974, p. 223, and Benardete 1989, p. 22.

²⁴² Cf. Irwin 1977, p. 31, Annas 1981, p. 44, Barney 2006, p. 46, Weiss 2007, p. 97.

avoiding paying the penalty for them. In truth everyone recognizes the superior profitability of injustice and they blame it for self-interested reasons.

3.2. Socrates' Defense of Justice (344c-354c)

Thrasymachus' own opinions have already been substantially revealed, with little new coming from him through the rest of Book One. As outlined above, the remainder of the conversation between Socrates and Thrasymachus consists in four refutations—one more of the claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger, and three cumulatively proving that justice is more profitable than injustice. Two features of these refutations are conspicuous. First, in the course of denying (yet again) that justice is the advantage of the stronger, Socrates tacitly grants to Thrasymachus the most important facts that his definition of justice rested on: the rulers in the cities are self-interested (346e, 347d) and, more generally, that wise or prudent people are essentially self-interested (347d). The second notable aspect of Socrates' refutations follows from the first. Socrates does not deny that rulers are self-interested; he denies that injustice is profitable. He challenges Thrasymachus' conception of the good. He does so through reference to the good of the soul (352d-354a)—something Thrasymachus was silent about.²⁴³

3.2.1. Rulers in the Precise Sense, Revisited (344c-347e)

Thrasymachus evidently thinks that what he has said is so obviously true that it could be refuted only through sophistry. Having finished his speech, he attempts to leave

²⁴³ See Rosen 2005, p. 49.

but is prevented by those present (344d). He agrees with Socrates that the matter at stake between them is “a course of life on the basis of which each of us would have the most profitable existence” (*lusitelestatēn zōēn zōēi*, 344e), but when Socrates asserts that he is unpersuaded that injustice, by stealth or open violence, is more profitable than justice, and that he is perhaps not alone in not being persuaded, Thrasymachus exasperatedly asks what more he could possibly say if what he has already said has failed to persuade. Nonetheless, he agrees to stay and submit to questioning, either to preserve his reputation or to win students or both (344d-345b).

Socrates charges Thrasymachus with changing his position. Previously they had established (according to Socrates) “that every kind of rule, insofar as it is rule, considers what is best for nothing other than for what is ruled and cared for, both in political and private rule” (345d-e). Accordingly, the true shepherd must be concerned solely with what is best for his sheep, and with fattening them for a feast or the market. This restatement is hardly convincing, however. Thrasymachus has pointed out what appears to be a valid counterexample. While medicine and piloting do appear to benefit the recipients of their practice rather than their practitioners, we have already noted that they are certainly not representative of all arts in this manner; and we noted that his account was not convincing because he completely abstracted from the motive that might lead someone to practice an art (such as shepherding). Socrates now remedies that defect.

Having restated their previous agreement, Socrates then extends his consideration of rulers in the precise sense, reintroducing the notion of “wages” that he had excluded from consideration before (see 341c). He asks Thrasymachus whether political rulers

exercise their rule willingly or not; Thrasymachus readily grants to him that they do so willingly. This follows from his belief that all rulers (or ruling bodies) are essentially self-interested. Socrates asserts that, at least with regard to “the other kinds of rule” (that is, the arts), the opposite would seem to be the case. Artisans demand wages for their work and will not perform it unless they receive them. This suggests that the immediate benefits from the practice of their arts do not go to them, the practitioners, but to those for whom they are practicing the art (345e-346a).

Socrates and Thrasymachus are actually referring to the same fact: those who rule or practice an art do so in order to receive some personal benefit in return. When Thrasymachus says that rulers rule willingly he means precisely that they choose to rule for the “wages” (personal benefits) that come to them from ruling: power, money, and so forth. He assumes, in other words, that Socrates’ previous argument was invalid. When Socrates argues that the demand for wages shows that artisans do not practice their arts willingly, he is being somewhat slippery. His claim rests on two premises. First, he is retaining the notion of a ruler in the precise sense, meaning that the impartial practitioner of an art, in which case any personal benefit that comes directly from practicing the art is only accidental. Second, he is still assuming that true political rule follows the model of the other arts. (That is, he is using the notion of the “ruler in the precise sense” to assume tacitly that political rulers are not corrupt in the manner Thrasymachus has referred to.) In that case, a ruler in the precise sense never (essentially) produces his own benefit through the practice of his art. Otherwise put, the practice of his art is not intrinsically beneficial to him. Consequently, he does not choose to practice it for its own sake.

Hence, if the wages were not attached to the practice, he would not choose to practice the art at all. Hence, he practices the art “unwillingly.” So Socrates and Thrasymachus agree that rulers rule for a “wage,” but Socrates concludes from that that the art of rule (which, for Thrasymachus, is convertible with the art of living well) is not intrinsically beneficial. It is not the comprehensive art of the human good—when understood on the model of the other arts.

Socrates expands on his claim that rulers do not rule willingly by introducing the as-yet unmentioned “wage-earner’s art” (*misthōtikē*, 346b). Each art, he observes, is distinguished from the other arts by the particular benefit which it and it alone has expertise in producing.²⁴⁴ So, for example, medicine produces health and piloting produces safe-sailing. If, then, there is some one thing that all artisans “produce” in addition to the products of their specific art, they must all be practicing a second art. Since, however, all the artisans earn wages while practicing their arts, they must all be practicing two arts: their own particular art, which produces its particular benefit, and the wage-earning art, which produces their wages (346b-c). (Thrasymachus assents to this, but “with resistance,” 346c). Therefore, Socrates reiterates, “no art or kind of rule provides for its own benefit, but...it provides for and commands the one who is ruled, considering his advantage—that of the weaker—and not that of the stronger.” Hence, as he said before (at 345e-346a), no one willingly rules, and would not take the trouble to rule and benefit others unless he received wages for doing so (346e).

²⁴⁴ Socrates initially says that the arts differ in their “capacities” (346a) by which he means more precisely their ability to produce, rationally and methodically, a particular benefit.

In this manner, Socrates makes an important concession to Thrasymachus without appearing to. He does this by introducing the bogus “wage-earning art.” That this art is indeed bogus is immediately clear once one considers that, contrary to Socrates’ supposed principle, the practice of the wage-earning art does not benefit the wages, it benefits the practitioner, and it is practiced for purely self-interested motives. By Socrates’ own purported standards there should be no “wage-earning art.” It is a stand-in for the calculations of self-interest that move people to practice arts.²⁴⁵ Nonetheless, by presenting it as a separate art, and by presenting the arts as forms of rule, Socrates is able to maintain his thesis that no ruler rules for his own sake but rather for the sake of the ruled. Now, however, he has added that the ruling for the sake of the ruled is merely a means to something else: the good of the ruler. In other words, he concedes to Thrasymachus that artisans practice their arts ultimately for self-interested reasons; and, since he has been treating arts as forms of rule, he is tacitly conceding that political rulers also rule ultimately for self-interested reasons.

Although Socrates has indeed made a back-handed concession, he has also drawn attention to something that Thrasymachus has been ignoring. As we mentioned above, even for their own advantage, rulers must take into consideration the good of those they rule over.²⁴⁶ Even perfect injustice must take care not to destroy the city which it exploits, just as shepherds cannot wholly ignore the well-being of their sheep. The desirability of perfect injustice therefore depends on what benefits can be extracted

²⁴⁵ See Bloom 1991, p. 332.

²⁴⁶ See Stauffer 2001, p. .

through taking the trouble to rule, and whether or in what cases these benefits outweigh the burdens incurred by political rule.

Thrasymachus had left no doubt concerning what he considers the true profit of ruling: material wealth and the goods it can supply. Almost all his examples of “getting the better” involve material wealth (see 343d-344b). Even the tyrant’s enslavement of other human beings should be understood either as a means to further wealth or a means to secure the wealth that the tyrant enjoys. Although we now see that Socrates does not dispute the proposition that artisans and rulers (and, so, anyone who acts in a manner guided by knowledge or prudence) do what they do ultimately for their own benefit, we also clearly see that Socrates, though talking of “wages,” has *not* specified what kind of “wages” he considers truly profitable.

From this fact we may provisionally conclude that Socrates’ true dispute with Thrasymachus is not over whether rulers are wholly self-forgetting servants of the common good or wholly greedy exploiters fleecing their subjects. Rather, the dispute is over what is truly profitable (especially for the ruler) and how one attains knowledge of what is profitable. The “wage-earning art” is a stand-in for the comprehensive art of the human good or for that knowledge which is knowledge of what is best for us.²⁴⁷

Before Thrasymachus has a chance to respond to Socrates’ reasoning, Glaucon intervenes. Socrates had said that rulers will only take the trouble to rule if they receive a wage, and he gave three examples of wages: money, honor, and a penalty (*zēmian*) for not ruling (346e-347a). Glaucon interrupts to say that he has never heard of the third

²⁴⁷ See Bloom 1991, pp. 332-34, who is anticipated by Joseph 1935, pp. 26-28.

kind of wage. Socrates chides Glaucon for being unfamiliar with the wages of the best (*beltistōn*, 347a) or the most decent (*epieikestatoi*, 347b) men. Glaucon readily concedes that love of money (i.e., greed) and love of honor (i.e., ambition) are genuine reproaches. Socrates concludes from this that the best men will therefore not rule out of either of those motives.²⁴⁸ Therefore, the best men will rule only when there is a penalty for not ruling. That penalty would be to be ruled by men worse than themselves. In cases where that is the only alternative, the best men will agree to rule, though they will consider it an unprofitable burden. Hence, Socrates says, if there were a city of good men, they would fight over *not* ruling, unlike the current situation, where people fight over who gets to rule (347b-d). As Socrates says, “everyone who knows (*pas ho gignōskōn*) would choose to be benefited by another rather than to take the trouble of benefiting another” (347d). It is because of this, he reiterates, that he cannot agree with Thrasymachus that justice is the advantage of the stronger. In other words, Thrasymachus is wrong that justice is the advantage of the stronger because Thrasymachus is right that justice is “someone else’s good,” though Socrates has turned around the meaning of that second phrase on account of his account of “rulers in the precise sense.”

Socrates has now explicitly granted to Thrasymachus what the latter had claimed about the rulers in the city: they rule for their own profit. He even grants to Thrasymachus the basic egoism of the latter’s position: the best men are wholly self-concerned and concern themselves with the good of others only when it impinges or

²⁴⁸ His reasoning, while not complicated, is not entirely straightforward; see 347b. He seems to suggest that the best men do not rule for money out of concern for their reputations. He asserts without explanation that they do not love honor. It seems that Socrates is appealing to Glaucon’s high-mindedness here, as Stauffer (2001, p. 92) suggests. Greed and ambition are usually considered questionable or base motives for seeking office. See Ferrari 2005, pp. 22-25 for a good discussion of *philotimia* (love of honor).

affects their own well-being. What he has denied, it seems, is that Thrasymachus' rulers are truly acting on the basis of knowledge concerning their own good. Socrates denies that anyone who knows what his true good is would ever seek the profits Thrasymachus associates with rule. On the other hand, Socrates says nothing positive about how the best men conceive of their own good. Their "wages" (the avoidance of being harmed on account of bad rulers) are merely negative.²⁴⁹

If one applies his reasoning about rulers to justice, one could say that Socrates has denied that fairness (*to ison*) is profitable and that "getting the better" (*pleonexia*) is profitable, but he has not said what is. The true dispute with Thrasymachus concerns the nature of the human good²⁵⁰. Only in light of the latter can one determine whether justice is profitable, and, even then, given what Socrates has conceded, he will have to redefine justice in order to prove that it is positively profitable.

3.2.2. Justice as Virtue and Wisdom (347e-350c)

Having explained the wages of the best men and reasserted his disagreement with Thrasymachus, Socrates says that they will later return to the topic of the definition of justice. Instead of going on with the question of the definition of justice, he calls to Glaucon's attention that Thrasymachus has introduced another claim: "that the life of the unjust man is stronger (or superior, *kreittō*) than that of the just man" (347e). He asks what Glaucon thinks, and Glaucon responds that, despite all the benefits of injustice that

²⁴⁹ As Strauss (1964, pp. 80-81) and Stauffer (2001, p. 93) put it, rule (and, by extension, justice) is a "necessary evil."

²⁵⁰ Cf. Stauffer 2001, p. 93.

Thrasymachus has listed, he is unpersuaded and still chooses the life of the just man as more profitable.²⁵¹ He still believes that the good and decent are just *and* that they profit by their justice. Socrates agrees to continue the conversation with Thrasymachus in order to try to persuade him that justice is more profitable (347e-348b). Given the indifference about truly persuading Thrasymachus that Socrates soon shows (see 349a-b, 350d-e), it is reasonable to conclude that Socrates continues the conversation for Glaucon's sake.²⁵²

Thrasymachus has asserted that perfect injustice is more profitable than justice. Socrates begins his cross-examination of that claim by introducing the topic of virtue. This is natural enough, since justice is ordinarily considered a virtue, and virtue is ordinarily considered a good thing to have.²⁵³ Since Thrasymachus has denied that justice is a good thing to have, it is reasonable to ask him whether he considers it a virtue. Thrasymachus also considers virtue a good thing to have, because he sarcastically denies that he would call justice virtue and injustice vice, saying instead that he holds "the opposite." He hesitates at first from calling justice a vice; rather, he calls it "very high-minded innocence" (*panu gennaion euētheian*); likewise, he calls injustice "good counsel" (*euboulia*) (348c-d).²⁵⁴ He goes on to affirm that the (successfully) unjust are good and prudent (*agathoi* and *phronimoi*), and, subsequently, that he does indeed place injustice in "the camp of virtue and wisdom" and justice in the opposite. He does so after

²⁵¹ Note that Socrates has not even claimed to have established this in his previous arguments. If the just man's life is more profitable, that cannot be the result of his "justice" in the ordinary sense of fairness.

²⁵² See Strauss 1964, p. 85, and Stauffer 2001, pp. 98-99.

²⁵³ The desire to be virtuous is not disinterested. Excellence consists in those qualities that allow one to live the best life possible, and it is assumed that such a life is good for the man living it and not only for those around him. Hence the question of the human good and the question of virtue imply one another. As Stauffer (2001, p. 103) has indicated, this also means that Socrates will attempt to prove the profitability of justice not independently or by citing evidence, but by proving that it is a virtue.

²⁵⁴ Indeed, as Chappell (1993, pp. 8, 10, and Dorter 2006, pp. 42-43) have argued, "good counsel" could arguably stand as Thrasymachus' name for virtue as such.

reminding Socrates that he is talking about the *perfectly* unjust, and not petty thieves. He grants that even petty crimes are profitable if they are not punished, but that the profits of such crimes are as nothing when compared to the fruits of tyranny (348d-e).²⁵⁵

Thus, Thrasymachus ultimately grants to Socrates that injustice is virtue and justice vice. Hence, he also claims that injustice is noble (*kalon*) and mighty and all the other qualities that are usually attributed to justice (since it is a virtue) (348e-349a). Socrates admits that this makes him harder to refute. Referring to the kind of argument that we saw him use against Polus (*Gorgias* 474c-477e), Socrates notes that he could have challenged Thrasymachus' claims in accordance with "customary usage" (*nomizomena*, 348e) if Thrasymachus had called injustice profitable but nonetheless vicious or shameful. Such reasoning in accord with "customary usage" is apparently not decisive.

In voicing the resolution to move ahead with the argument despite the difficulty, Socrates adds that Thrasymachus seems to be speaking his true opinion now, and not to be joking. Thrasymachus responds by asking why whether he is being serious makes any difference for Socrates, telling him to "refute the argument." Surprisingly, Socrates responds that it does not matter (349a-b). In other words, Socrates will push ahead with the argument whether or not Thrasymachus is persuaded (cf. 350e). This is another indication that the argument continues at least partly for Glaucon's sake.

Socrates proves that justice, not injustice, is wisdom and virtue by showing that the just man acts more like other men who are recognized to be wise (artisans), while the

²⁵⁵ Thus he reprises Polus' expression of this common view; see *Gorgias* 469c-470b.

unjust act like the ignorant. The just neither wish to “get the better” (*pleon echein*) of other just people, nor do they claim that they deserve to get the better of them. In addition, they are not willing to “get the better” (again, *pleon echein*, though better rendered here as “exceed”) of the just action. The just do, however, claim that they deserve to get the better of the unjust and that it is just for them to do so.²⁵⁶ Unjust people, on the other hand, think that they deserve to get the better of everybody (just and unjust alike) as well as of the just action (349b-c). From these considerations Socrates, to Thrasymachus’ approval, draws the general conclusion that “the just man does not get the better of what is like but of what is unlike, while the unjust man gets the better of like and unlike” (349c-d).

Socrates then induces Thrasymachus to make a massive blunder. When Thrasymachus reaffirms that the unjust are prudent and good, Socrates asks him whether they are therefore also *like* the prudent and the good. Thrasymachus responds by saying that they must be like the prudent and good, since they are so, while the just are not like them. Appearing to restate what Thrasymachus has said, Socrates asks whether this means that “each of them is such as those to whom he is like” (*toioutos...estin hekateros autōn hois per eoiken*, 349d). Rashly, Thrasymachus says, “How could they not be?” This claim, however, is blatantly false, and Socrates knows it.²⁵⁷ He has taken advantage of Thrasymachus’ poor argumentative skills.

²⁵⁶ Consider again Polemarchus’ comment at 335b.

²⁵⁷ As Dorter (2006, p. 44) points out, this principle runs entirely counter to the argument at 454a-c meant to establish that men and women can both be assigned to the same work despite having different natures. One could also add that the principle contradicts the very notion of imitation—a very important topic in the *Republic*.

Socrates completes his argument in the following manner (349e-350c). Using the examples of music and medicine, he obtains Thrasymachus' agreement to the principle that, for every kind of knowledge, no knower would choose to "get the better" of another knower in speech or deed. The ignorant person, on the other hand, would try to get the better of both other ignorant people and those who are knowledgeable.²⁵⁸ Since the knower is wise and good, it follows that the wise and good will not attempt to get the better of those like them (others who are wise and good) but only of those unlike them, while the "bad and unlearned" will try to get the better of both like and unlike. Thus, the just resemble the wise and good, and the unjust resemble the bad and unlearned. But, since each is such as what he is like, it follows that the just are wise and good, and the unjust are bad and unlearned, contrary to Thrasymachus' claim. Thrasymachus, with increasing reluctance and resistance, cedes each step in this argument.

This argument is utterly unconvincing. It is true that Thrasymachus presents a particularly crude picture of the unjust person here. He appears as someone whose entire activity in life lies in trying to get his hands on as many things as possible, a kind of indiscriminate grasping. At any rate, this indiscriminateness enables Socrates to manipulate the reasoning the way he does.²⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the argument has at least three major faults. We have already mentioned the first: the principle by which he proves the identity of the just with the wise and good (that "each is such as that which he

²⁵⁸ Here, "get the better" means, basically, "do something different from...in pursuit of success."

²⁵⁹ On the other hand, Bloom (1991, pp. 335-36) points out an apparently similar distortion on Socrates' side. If Thrasymachus sees the unjust man's activity lying in the attempt to seize as many scarce goods as possible ("scarce" in the sense that, to be gotten, they must be taken from another), Socrates' argument seems to presuppose that the good things are not scarce at all and that a just person would never have need to "get the better" of other just people—a position that seems to be inconsistent with the evident scarcity of some goods, such as land. Socrates had made a similar assumption at *Gorgias* 490b-e.

is like”) is manifestly false. Hence, he establishes only the similarity of the just to the wise and the good, not their identity.

In fact, he does not do even that. For the second fault with this line of argument lies in the notion of the “wise” and the “good.” When talking about experts in a particular field, the attributions of wisdom (or prudence) and goodness are of a specific and limited application. They are prudent *with respect to the practice of their art*; they are good *at their art*. When Thrasymachus speaks of the unjust being wise and good, however, he means this in a different sense. They are not wise and good with respect to some technical ability; they are wise and good with respect to achieving great happiness through committing successful injustice. They are wise insofar as it takes intelligence both to see through justice and to get away with it successfully on a large scale; they are good because they show true virtue based on knowing the truth about justice and self-interest. In other words, he (like Socrates at the end of the argument) is applying to the unjust the notions of “wisdom” and “goodness” in the sense of human excellence, not technical expertise. There is an equivocation. Even if one grants that the just are wise and good, they are not wise and good in the same way that technical experts are. Thus, just as Socrates has not proven the identity of the just with the virtuous, he has not established anything more than a *superficial* resemblance.

The greatest equivocation lies in Socrates’ use of the term “get the better” (*pleonechein*).²⁶⁰ The “overreaching” (*pleonexia*) of the unjust and that of the ignorant are not the same. The ignorant overreach in the sense that they go wrong. They are attempting

²⁶⁰ See Cross and Woosley 1964, p. 52, Allan 1993, pp. 31-32, and Annas 1981, p. 51.

to do what the knowledgeable do, but they fail on account of their ignorance.²⁶¹ The unjust, on the other hand, are not trying but failing to do what the just do. They are deliberately doing otherwise, and out of a desire to “get the better” in the natural sense of the term (to benefit themselves at another’s expense).²⁶² Socrates may suggest here that a wise person would be just, and that the unjust commit injustice out of ignorance (of their true good), but it is merely a suggestion. It is not proven.²⁶³ A true proof would require an account of the human good, which the wise know and pursue on the basis of their knowledge. Once again, in other words, a Socratic argument defending justice resolves itself into an indication of the paramount need for knowledge of the human good, with the attendant implication that most human beings (especially, but not exclusively, those who practice injustice) are ignorant of it, though they think it obvious.

3.2.3. Justice is Mightier than Injustice (350c-352d)

Socrates informs his listener(s) that in the course of the foregoing refutation, Thrasymachus put up much resistance, sweated a great deal, and, finally, blushed—something Socrates had never seen before (350c-d). Socrates offers no opinion as to why Thrasymachus blushed, but the most natural inference is that he did so on account of the frustration and embarrassment of being outwitted after presenting himself before as

²⁶¹ It is empirically impossible that Socrates could be claiming that ignorance of, say, music creates in the ignorant person the desire to outperform a knowledgeable musician.

²⁶² This also implies, as Stauffer (2001, pp. 105-06) and Annas (1981, pp. 51-52) have said, that the restraint practiced by the wise is not the same as the restraint practiced by the just. The just are not restrained on account of knowledge but on account of an intention not to harm.

²⁶³ As Irwin (1977, pp. 181-82) emphasizes. Joseph (1935, pp. 29-30), while not insisting that Socrates succeeds, does claim that Socrates is intending to give here one version of his famous claim that “vice is ignorance.”

almost rashly confident in the truth of his opinions (see, again, 345b). As a result of his embarrassment, Thrasymachus ceases to resist Socrates. He protests Socrates' unwillingness to let him speak at length in response (and he says that he does, indeed, have a response to give), but he nonetheless acquiesces in the demand that the dispute continue dialectically rather than through trading speeches (350d-e; cf. 348a-b). Thrasymachus' acquiescence allows Socrates to finish his counterargument, but it also serves to render it even less convincing than it already is, since Thrasymachus does not even attempt to challenge any of Socrates' assertions.²⁶⁴ Socrates, in return, shows a remarkable indifference to whether he is actually persuading Thrasymachus or not. When the latter says that, if they proceed dialectically, he will humor him by nodding along insincerely, Socrates says, in effect, "go ahead" (350d-e).

Socrates next takes up the claim that injustice is mightier (*ischuroteron*) than justice (350e-352d; cf. 344c). He asserts that he could easily prove on the basis of what came before that justice is mightier than injustice. That is, if justice is virtue and wisdom, and injustice is vice and lack of learning, then it is not hard to prove that justice is mightier.²⁶⁵ Nonetheless, he rejects such a "simple" proof (351a). Thrasymachus, when he spoke of injustice being mightier than justice, was clearly talking about tyranny—the injustice of someone with the disposition and the ability to "get the better in a big way" (344a). In recognition of this, Socrates asks him whether a city is unjust

²⁶⁴ See Guthrie 1969, III: pp. 90-91, and Beversluis 2000, p. 237. In this, Thrasymachus' behavior parallels that of Callicles (see *Gorgias* 497b-c, 501c, 504d-505a, 505c), except that Thrasymachus submits for the sake of the people listening (352b), while Callicles requires Gorgias' request.

²⁶⁵ He seems to be alluding to an argument such as that delivered at *Gorgias* 466e-467a. Great power wielded without knowledge is not profitable for the one who has power. Hence, an ignorant man can never be truly "mighty" no matter how much power to act he has.

which attempts to subjugate and does subjugate another city unjustly. Thrasymachus agrees, adding that the best (*aristē*) city will do this to the greatest extent (351b). (That is, the best city will act towards other cities in the exact same way the tyrant acts towards other human beings.) Socrates then asks Thrasymachus whether a city that overpowers another in this way is able to do so on account of justice or injustice. (We will see in a moment what Socrates means in asking this.) Thrasymachus responds that it depends on which one is wisdom. If Socrates is right and justice is wisdom, then the city will need justice, while, if he is right and injustice is wisdom, then it will need injustice (351b-c). Thrasymachus, unsurprisingly, has been unpersuaded by the previous argument. In fact, his response could be translated as follows: “The wise city, the city that knows what is good for it, will attempt to enslave other cities to the greatest degree possible. Whether you wish to call the wisdom that dictates this conduct ‘justice’ or ‘injustice’ does not really matter.”

Socrates then proves that the unjust city will need at least “partial” justice (351c-d). No group (be it a city or an army or what have you) can achieve an unjust common enterprise unless they practice justice towards one another. They would never be able to accomplish together as a group so long as they were harming or seeking to harm one another. (The same reasoning holds in the case of a partnership between only two people; 351e). Socrates’ reasoning here is obviously correct, and its correctness is obvious because he is using the ordinary sense of justice as fairness or refraining from harm (and, of course, the ordinary sense of injustice as seeking to benefit oneself at

another's expense). Justice is *the* virtue of social cooperation. Thrasymachus recognizes the force of this reasoning.

Socrates' next step is more dubious. Thrasymachus agrees that the "work" of injustice is to cause hatred and enmity, and also to render incapable of action whatever it comes to be present in (351d-352a). Because Thrasymachus (insincerely) grants to him that injustice will have the same "power" even when it comes to be in a single person, Socrates concludes that an unjust person will be at war with himself and incapable of achieving anything.²⁶⁶ The treatment of injustice as a "power" is dubious, however. Injustice may cause hatred and faction, but it can also be caused by it. That is, people may hate and fight one another because they are unjust, but they may also commit injustice out of hatred. At any rate, the application of this reasoning to a single person is completely unjustified here, and is only made possible by treating injustice as a "power."²⁶⁷ It rests on the as-yet unjustified premise that the soul has parts that can somehow practice injustice against one another.²⁶⁸ Socrates in no way proves, then, that a person who is unjust is at war with himself and incapable of action.

What is more, this is a merely utilitarian vindication of political (or social) justice. Justice within a group would appear to be a necessary evil, contingent upon each individual's dependence on the group for his well-being.²⁶⁹ It might be true that complete injustice would be unprofitable (since one would be incapable of cooperation

²⁶⁶ He will even be an enemy of the gods, since the gods are just (352a-b). Thrasymachus clearly does not take this consideration seriously.

²⁶⁷ On the other hand, it prefigures the *Republic's* subsequent definition of justice at 441d-e, 443c-444a.

²⁶⁸ Irwin (1977, p. 183 and 1995, p. 179) suggests that Socrates' statement could be true if internal justice is something other than *pleonexia*—in which case, of course, the analogy fails to hold between groups and the individual.

²⁶⁹ See Bloom 1991, p. 336.

with anyone), but Socrates' argument does not prove that being just is more profitable than a judicious combination of justice and injustice.²⁷⁰ In that case, justice would be profitable only insofar as it is in the service of injustice.²⁷¹ This line of reasoning is, in fact, a further critique of Polemarchus' definition of justice as helping friends and harming enemies. Although serving the common interest might seem to be the height of justice, if one understands justice as refraining from *pleonexia*, then the common interest one serves may itself be unjust.²⁷² Finally, this argument does nothing to show that an individual who has sufficient power to become a tyrant should not do so. There is no reason offered for why an individual ought to subordinate his own good to that of the group in those cases where he can serve his own interest even better through injustice. This argument, in sum, is no proof that justice as fairness is always more profitable than *pleonexia*.

3.2.4. The Just Are Happier than the Unjust (352d-354a)

Socrates' final refutation of Thrasymachus implicitly acknowledges the shortcoming of the previous argument. Whereas it has left open the possibility that a combination of justice and injustice might be more profitable than one or the other, Socrates' last refutation ostensibly proves that injustice and being unjust is never more profitable than justice. Socrates begins by reminding Thrasymachus that this is, after all, what is at stake between them: how one should live (352d; cf. 344e).

²⁷⁰ As Irwin (1977, p. 183) insists; see also Pappas 2003, p. 47.

²⁷¹ See Strauss 1964, p. 82.

²⁷² As Socrates had said toward the end of his conversation with him (at 366a), that definition of justice is the maxim of those who are bent on injustice. Stauffer (2001, p. 109) remarks that this line of reasoning robs the common good of its dignity.

Socrates begins by speaking of functions (or “works,” *erga*) and virtues (*aretai*). He first gains Thrasymachus’ agreement that there are things, such as horses, that have a “function” or “work” (*ergon*) proper to them. The function of something is “that which one can do only with it, or [which one can do] best with it” 352e). For example, seeing is the work of the eyes, because one can see *only* with the eyes. This is an example of the first kind of function: that which can be done only with one thing. As an example of a function of the second type (that which can be done best with something), Socrates mentions a pruning knife. A vine can be cut by any number of sharp objects, but a pruning knife (specially designed for the job) cuts vines in the best manner. Hence, that is its function (352e-353b). Thrasymachus next agrees that everything that has a function has an attendant virtue which enables it to perform that function well—although Socrates refrains from giving an example. If, instead of its proper virtue, something possesses vice, it will perform its function badly. (353b-d).

Socrates then applies this reasoning to the human soul (353d-354a). Thrasymachus agrees that the soul has a function. In fact, he agrees that the soul has two functions. On the one hand, one manages, rules, and deliberates by means of the soul (*epimeleisthai kai archein kai boulesthai*); on the other hand, it is by the soul that one lives (*to zēn*, 353d). Since the soul has a function, it must therefore have a virtue by which it performs that function well. Since a soul cannot perform its function well without its proper virtue, it follows that “a bad soul necessarily rules and manages badly, while a good one does all these things well” (353e). Socrates then recalls their earlier agreement (349b-350c) that justice is the virtue of the soul. Thus, it turns out that the just

man, because he has the soul's proper virtue, will live well (*eu biōsetai*); living well, he will be happy. The unjust man, on the other hand, will live badly and be miserable. Since it is profitable to be happy and not to be miserable, it follows that injustice is never more profitable than justice and that one must be just to be happy (353d-354a).

This argument has numerous faults. To begin with, it relies on an equivocation of the word "live." When Thrasymachus agrees that it is by the soul that we live, he is likely thinking of life in the physical sense, involving motion, perception, and metabolism. But "life" can also refer to the course of events and decisions that makes up one's personal existence. Thus, when Socrates speaks of "living well," he has the latter sense in mind: someone who enjoys good fortune or happiness.²⁷³ After all, a stupid person is no less "alive" (in the first sense) than a wise one.

The more serious fault of this argument is that it simply imports the claim that justice is virtue of soul. Socrates does not deduce the need for justice from a consideration of what is required for good deliberation or living. Instead, he relies on his previous, extremely faulty proof that justice is virtue. Hence, he does not in fact prove that justice is that by which we deliberate and live well.²⁷⁴ Further, as Pappas (2203, p. 48) remarks, this argument only works if justice is *the* (not just *a*) virtue of the soul. Hence, even if justice *is* a virtue, Socrates has not proven that it is necessary for living well. Why would living well *not* require *pleonexia*? After all, Socrates has acknowledged all along the legitimacy of personal happiness as one's overriding motive.

²⁷³ See Allan 1993, pp. 109-10 and Joseph 1935, pp. 38-40 on this ambiguity.

²⁷⁴ See Annas 1981, p. 55, and Stauffer 2001, pp. 113-14.

Hence, this argument has an effect similar to the monologue he delivered to Callicles (see *Gorgias* 504b-e, 506c-508c). Justice functions as a stand in for the virtue or good condition of the soul, but no true connection is made between the needs of the soul and justice as it is commonly understood (refraining from *pleonexia*).²⁷⁵ For that matter, the soul itself remains obscure and, consequently, any substantial account of the nature of happiness or the human good is missing as well. In other words, Socrates proves that justice is more profitable than injustice without saying what justice is, whether it truly is the virtue of the soul, what the soul is, or what profit (i.e., happiness) is.²⁷⁶

Socrates acknowledges this. Having been refuted, Thrasymachus tells him to have his fill of the argument. Socrates declares himself unsatisfied, however; but he blames himself. He says that he has learned nothing from their exchange because, before they determined the definition of justice, they moved on to the questions whether justice is wisdom and virtue, and whether justice is more profitable than injustice; but one cannot determine those things unless one first knows what justice is. Hence Socrates knows nothing. With this, Book One ends.

4. Conclusion²⁷⁷

At the conclusion of the last chapter, we noted that, upon examination, Gorgias, Polus, Callicles, Cephalus, and Polemarchus all relied upon the same basic understanding

²⁷⁵ See Bloom 1991, p. 337.

²⁷⁶ For a detailed list of the faults of this argument, see Beversluis 2000, p. 242.

²⁷⁷ In this section all Stephanus page references refer to the *Republic* unless otherwise indicated.

of justice as fairness (*to ison*) or refraining from *pleonexia* (harming others in order to benefit oneself). That Gorgias, Polus, and Cephalus understood justice in this manner was immediately clear from their speeches.²⁷⁸ (Whether or not they considered justice profitable is a different question.) Callicles invoked two different definitions of justice, conventional and natural justice (see *Gorgias* 483b-484c). Conventional justice corresponded to justice as fairness. (Indeed, with the upcoming exception of Glaucon, Callicles is the only one who clearly defines justice in this manner). Natural justice, on the other hand, consisted of the naturally superior ruling the inferior and having more (*pleon echein*) than them. This second definition proved incoherent and, insofar as it could be justified, presupposed a notion of merit based on contribution to a common good.²⁷⁹ As such, this definition becomes a specification of justice as fairness rather than an alternative to it—and thus is open to the same objections that Callicles raised against conventional justice (that it lacks a basis in nature, is not personally profitable, and so forth).

Like Callicles, Polemarchus at first seemed to define justice as something other than fairness. He defined it as “helping friends and harming enemies” (itself a clarification of the more general definition “rendering to each what is fitting; see 331e-332c). Upon examination, however, he revealed not only that he also understood justice as fairness (or refraining from *pleonexia*), but that the demands of justice as fairness cut across the distinction between friend and enemy (see 334d, 335a-b; cf. 334b). This was evidently the result of his conviction that justice is human virtue (334d, 335c), something

²⁷⁸ See, for example, *Gorgias* 456c-457a, 466b-c, and *Republic* 331b.

²⁷⁹ See *Gorgias* 491c-d, 502e-503c, 515c-d, and 517a-b.

he accepts but gives no explicit justification for (especially given that the demands of justice turn out to be different from what he thought they were; see 335b, d).

Nonetheless, the notion of justice as fairness proved to be more fundamental to Polemarchus' understanding than even helping friends and harming enemies.

Thrasymachus' case is similar to that of Polemarchus. He began by defining justice as "the advantage of the stronger" (338c). He deduced this definition from the more common identification of the just with the lawful (or, as he also says, with doing what the rulers command; see 338e-339a). In the course of the conversation, he revealed that he, too, fundamentally understands justice to consist in fairness or refraining from *pleonexia* (see 343d-344c). Because justice is fairness, it is not intrinsically profitable to the just man; because injustice consists in benefiting oneself at another's expense, injustice is intrinsically profitable. The just is identified with the lawful because it is the claim that the law is fundamentally fair: it impartially serves the common interest. Justice is, in truth, the advantage of the stronger because the laws are made by the ruling class and, while the ruling class claims that their laws are fair, in fact they are designed to benefit the rulers at the expense of the ruled. Hence the rulers are unjust, and the claim that justice is the advantage of the stronger is meant to reveal this hidden fact. Thus, his discussion of the origin of the law in the self-interest of the ruling class reveals important facts *about* what passes for justice in political life, but it presupposes that the fundamental definition of justice is fairness.

Although these interlocutors have shared the same basic understanding of what justice is, they have not all shared the same estimation of justice. Polemarchus

considered it nothing less than human virtue itself (335c), though his various statements about the good that comes from justice suggested that justice is merely instrumentally good (see 332e-333e). Gorgias, for prudential reasons, deferred to the opinion that everyone ought to be just, though his praise of his own art tacitly presupposed that injustice is often more personally profitable than justice.²⁸⁰ Cephalus also deferred to this opinion (331b), though, in his case, the benefits of being just were said to rest on the existence of divine sanctions for injustice (330d-331a). He nonetheless acknowledged that this belief has uncertain foundations (330d-e) and, in any case, he revealed that his own lifelong justice was the product of wealth he enjoyed and his moderate appetites (relative to the wealth) rather than the product of devotion to justice itself (see 330d, 331a-b). Polus, following on Gorgias, openly acknowledges that large-scale successful injustice is more personally profitable than justice (see *Gorgias* 466b-c, 468e-469a, 470b-d, 471a-d), but he nonetheless defers to the claim that justice remains, for all of that, more noble or admirable than injustice (*Gorgias* 474c-d, 478b). Callicles and Thrasymachus stand out as the only two interlocutors who openly blame justice, not only denying that justice is personally beneficial, but refusing even to call it noble or a virtue.²⁸¹ In both cases, they reject justice's status as a virtue *because* of the fact that it is not profitable (or not profitable to the best human beings).²⁸²

Despite their differing estimations of justice and, hence, their differing understandings of virtue, they are in remarkable agreement concerning the nature of the

²⁸⁰ Cf. *Gorgias* 456c-457a with 452d-e, and with 461b-c and 482c-d.

²⁸¹ See *Gorgias* 482d-483b and *Republic* 348e-349a

²⁸² See *Gorgias* 492b-c and *Republic* 348b-c

human good or the identity of the “good things” that make human beings happy.²⁸³

Broadly speaking, happiness consists in the possession and enjoyment of material wealth and bodily pleasure and security, along with whatever means might be necessary to these (comrades, good reputation, power). Further, they clearly understand the demands of justice to be based primarily on the need to acquire or secure the enjoyment of bodily and material goods.²⁸⁴ (In Thrasymachus’ case, money and reputation appeared paramount; see 337d, 343d-344c). The need to protect individuals in their enjoyment of these goods indicated the widespread opinion that “having more” (*pleon echein*) of these goods is personally beneficial, and hence that people need to be restrained in their pursuit of these goods. This restraint is brought about through punishments and censure.²⁸⁵ This line of thought suggests, of course, that committing injustice is intrinsically more profitable and acting justly towards others so long as it is not punished. Thus, both those who defer to justice and those who criticize it acknowledge the profitability of injustice.

Further, since critics and defenders of justice appear to have basically the same conception of the substance of happiness, the critics would appear to be more consistent in the conclusions they draw from this. If having more is more profitable than having an equal share, then the more one has, the better off one is. So long as one is successfully unjust, there appears to be no limit beyond which committing injustice ceases to be profitable. While the weak may profit from justice, anyone with the capacity to commit injustice successfully would therefore be a fool not to do so, since he has no basis for

²⁸³ See *Gorgias* 452d-e, 466a-c, 486c-d, 491e-492c, and *Republic* 328d, 331a-b, 332a, 332e-333e, 343d-344c, 348d.

²⁸⁴ This is implied in several of the passages cited in the previous note.

²⁸⁵ See *Gorgias* 469d-470a, 483b-c, 492a-b, and *Republic* 330d-331a, 338e-339a, 344a-b

rationally preferring justice over injustice when justice is not dictated by self-interest.²⁸⁶

In principle, the goods of life are scarce and each individual's interest is ultimately at odds with that of everyone else.

Neither Gorgias nor Cephalus nor Polemarchus offer a convincing reason for preferring justice to injustice in those cases where one has the power to commit injustice with impunity. Gorgias' deference to justice appears to be dictated wholly by self-interest (as Callicles in fact claims, *Gorgias* 482c-d): he does not want to incur the anger or indignation directed at those who openly praise injustice. Nonetheless, as we have already noted, he praises rhetoric precisely for its ability to give a person the power to transcend the necessity to be just. Cephalus, it is true, bases his preference for justice partly on his opinion that moderation is superior to excess. He offers, as his reason, that tranquility is a much pleasanter state than that of being "tyrannized" by strong desires (see 329a-d). However, not only is it not clear that he has always valued this moderation (see 328d), it is evident that many others do not. He has given them no compelling reason to change their minds. As for the "intelligent man's" preference for justice (331b), we have already seen that Cephalus openly bases this preference on the dubious belief in divine providence. Finally, with regard to Polemarchus, his definition of justice turns out to be perfectly compatible with (333e-334b, 336a) and even presupposed by (351b-352d) the collective pursuit of injustice at the expense of other collectivities. Polemarchus can offer no ground for an individual within a group to prefer justice over injustice when the practice of justice is not dictated by one's self-interest. He does not

²⁸⁶ See *Gorgias* 491e-492c and *Republic* 343d-344c, 348b-d.

even mention moderation. Socrates' cross-examinations of Cephalus and Polemarchus thus deepen the problem of justice, precisely because they assume that justice is good but fail to establish this in a manner sufficient to rebut the critics of justice.

Thrasymachus on his own makes one primary contribution to the foregoing assessment of the nature and profitability of justice. As already noted, Thrasymachus offers the most specifically *political* account of justice. Unlike Callicles, who speaks generally about the many, law (*nomos*) and justice, Thrasymachus reveals that the regime or ruling class of the city is the true origin of what passes for justice in any given city. Callicles' account proves partial in this respect, applying best to democracy but less so to other regimes. Through consideration of regimes, Thrasymachus is able to assert not only that the life of the tyrant is most profitable, but that tyranny does not differ fundamentally from other forms of political rule. In particular, it is not opposed in principle to the rule of law. The law is always the imposition of some group and serves its interests at the expense of other groups.²⁸⁷

Thrasymachus makes his greatest contribution to the articulation of the problem of justice through the counter-arguments he provokes from Socrates—and thus through what his arguments indirectly reveal about how Socrates conceives of the problem. In the first place, although he does not call much attention to the fact, Socrates makes a number of significant concessions to Thrasymachus. He grants that actually-existing rulers and regimes are essentially self-interested and do not rule for the sake of the

²⁸⁷ Thrasymachus also proves to be a more formidable interlocutor than (1) Polus, because he refuses to say that justice is noble and (2) Callicles, since he does not try to give an account of “natural” justice, nor does he attempt to defend hedonism.

common good (see 347d). Since he does not challenge Thrasymachus' claim that regimes (or ruling classes) are the origin of the laws, Socrates thus implicitly grants that the laws (*nomoi*) are often not just.²⁸⁸ Indeed, Socrates even suggests that the justice that holds cities together is no different than that which robbers respect towards one another when they band together to do injustice to others (see, again, 333e-334b and 351b-352d). Finally, Socrates does not attempt to defend justice by arguing that it is in service to a good that is higher than our own self-interest. Rather, he accepts the egoistic premise of Thrasymachus' argument, that it is entirely legitimate for a person to be motivated entirely by his own self-interest (see 346e-347a). Indeed, Socrates attributes this motive to "the best men" (see 347c-d).

In addition to these concessions to Thrasymachus' position, it is clear that all of Socrates' counterarguments are faulty or fallacious. As we noted, his proof that justice is wisdom and virtue (348b-350e) rests on equivocation, false analogy, and false premise. His proof that justice is mightier than injustice (350e-352d) not only contains a questionable step (when he applies his reasoning about justice in groups to the isolated individual), but fails to rule out the possibility that a prudent combination of justice and injustice (in the service, ultimately of *pleonexia*) is the most profitable course of action. His argument that justice is always more profitable than injustice (352d-354a) rests on equivocation ("living well") and, more importantly, the as-yet unjustified premise that justice is (or implies) the whole of human virtue. This premise is especially questionable

²⁸⁸ Indeed, the justice of the law is put in question as soon as he begins to cross-examine Cephalus (see 331c-d), and remains in question while cross-examining Polemarchus (see 331e-332b). On the full implications of these passages, see Strauss 1964, pp. 68-69).

since the “functions” of the soul that are listed (managing, ruling, deliberating, and living) are all problematically related to justice (at best). It is also worth noting, finally, that, since the practice of justice ordinarily consists in law-abiding behavior, and since Socrates has failed to vindicate the *nomoi* of any existing cities, Socrates conspicuously fails to prove that being just in the ordinary sense promotes “human virtue” at all.

In sum, two parts of Socrates’ response to Thrasymachus share in the same faults that we saw in his response to Callicles. First, Socrates presents justice as though it were the whole of human virtue, without offering any convincing proof thereof (see *Gorgias* 477a-b, 478a; cf. 477b-e). Second, he fails to prove convincingly that the “justice” which he is defending is substantially identical to “justice” as it is ordinarily conceived (which includes law-abidingness) (see *Gorgias* 504b-d; cf. 507a-c). Here, as in the *Gorgias*, Socrates does not explicitly call attention to these shortcomings. If anything, the exchange with Thrasymachus deepens the problems with Socrates’ defense of justice in the *Gorgias*, since the critique of Athens delivered in the latter (*Gorgias* 513a-c, 517b-519b) applies in principle to every city, since Socrates admits that the policies of cities are usually dictated by self-interest and not concern for justice (since he never contradicts 338d-339a).

As in the *Gorgias*, Socrates’ defense of justice against Thrasymachus has another, deeper purpose than to vindicate justice as it is ordinarily conceived. What Socrates truly challenges is Thrasymachus’ conception of the good—the conception that led him to deny the value of justice—and, hence, his conception of prudence and virtue. Socrates grants the faulty justice of every existing political order, he grants the self-interest of the

rulers, the partiality of the laws, the injustice of foreign policy; he even grants that the best men would never voluntarily assume responsibility for the good of others and, thus, that the practice of justice is, in fact, “someone else’s good” (cf. 346e-347a and 347d with 343c, d-e). What he never grants is that *pleonexia* is profitable. He never grants that happiness can be gained or true self-interest served through the pursuit of those goods which one can have only by taking them from others.²⁸⁹ He thereby also implicitly criticizes the conception of the good that is presupposed by the ordinary understanding of justice, since, as we have seen, the defenders and the critics of justice are substantially in agreement on the requirements of happiness.

Socrates last refutation of Thrasymachus (352d-354a) suggests the basis for his rejection of this conception of the good: it neglects the good of the *soul*. In this respect, Socrates’ argument resembles the defense of justice that he delivered to Callicles (see *Gorgias* 504a-d, 506c-507c), the basic premise of which is that happiness requires a soul in good condition (cf. *Gorgias* 512d-513b). The argument also recalls part of Socrates’ exchange with Polemarchus. When Polemarchus granted that it is only just to harm enemies if those enemies are bad (334c-335b), we noted that this seemed to run counter to the requirements of political life, since it seemed to presuppose that the scarce goods that often force cities to go to war with one another are not of any practical importance. If they were, one might be forced for the good of one’s city to kill enemy soldiers in war, even if they were just men. In addition, Socrates’ proof to Polemarchus that the just man harms no one (335b-d) seemed to presuppose that the only goods of decisive importance

²⁸⁹ Cf. Johnson 2005, pp. 154-55.

for happiness are not scarce and are not of the sort that could be gained at the expense of others. Rather, the argument presupposed that the only good of decisive importance for happiness is human virtue. Both of these arguments make sense only if the good condition of the soul is necessary for happiness and if it requires justice.

The fundamental difficulty with Socrates' defenses of justice is that the nature of the soul remains obscure. Because of this, we cannot know what the human good (or happiness) truly consists in. Thus, in the guise of defending justice, Socrates has radicalized the problem. If Thrasymachus and the other interlocutors are correct about the good, then injustice, when successful, is more profitable than justice. Socrates implies, on the other hand, that if *he* is correct about the good, then the critics of justice are wrong. Because we know what neither the soul nor the good is, we cannot know whether justice is necessary for happiness. What is more, although Socrates has asserted that justice is the virtue of the soul (and, hence, necessary for happiness), he has neither convincingly proven this, nor has he explained how this kind of justice (the virtue of the soul necessary for happiness because necessary for the good functioning of the soul) is related to justice in the ordinary sense (as fairness or refraining from *pleonexia*).²⁹⁰ One must know the nature of the soul in order to know both what happiness is and what its virtue is, and only then could one determine how that virtue is related to "justice." As in the *Gorgias*, it would seem that Socrates has offered a problematic defense of justice precisely in order to elicit this further inquiry.

²⁹⁰ See Strauss 1964, pp. 83-84, Bloom 1991, p. 337, and Stauffer 2001, p. 118.

Chapter Five:
Socrates' Defense of Justice in the *Republic* (II-X)

In this final chapter, I will analyze the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus (*Republic* 357a-367e) and, in rough outline, Socrates' response in the rest of the *Republic*. Although Glaucon and Adeimantus are not genuine critics of justice (they offer their critiques in order to elicit a defense of justice from Socrates), their speeches are noteworthy. They incorporate all of the strengths of Callicles' and Thrasymachus' critiques, but none of their weaknesses. They allow us thereby to get a particularly clear view of the core of the problem of justice.

In addition, they inspire Socrates to deliver a more thorough and radical defense of justice than that attempted in either the *Gorgias* or in conversation with Thrasymachus. It will turn out that he broadly follows the same argumentative strategy that he did with Callicles and Thrasymachus, but with two important differences. The *Republic's* account of the tripartite soul (reason, spirit, desire; see 434d-444e, 588b-592b), and its treatment of the philosophic life (474c-540c) allow Socrates to give a more thorough defense of justice than in the *Gorgias*. In the *Republic*, he goes so far as to deliver an explicit defense of ordinary justice. This defense, as we shall see, is only partial. Hence we see the limit to which Socrates is able to endorse the ordinary understanding of justice, and the grounds upon which he can deliver that defense. Despite this greater thoroughness and scope, the omission of an explicit discussion of the form of the Good (see 435c-d,

504a-c, 506c-e) renders incomplete the *Republic*'s definition and entire defense of justice. Socrates is not willing to deliver a complete defense of justice.

1. Glaucon and Adeimantus (357a-367e)

1.1. Glaucon (357a-362c)

Glaucon is unpersuaded by Socrates' arguments, as he should be. Thrasymachus has been charmed rather than refuted, he says (367a, 358b). Yet Glaucon wishes very much to be persuaded that justice is superior to injustice. He had urged Socrates to continue the conversation with Thrasymachus precisely because he believed that justice was more profitable than injustice and wanted Socrates to prove this (347e-348b).²⁹¹ We need not go over again the weaknesses of those proofs—proofs which heightened rather than resolved the problem. Once again wishing to have it proved that “it is in every way better to be just than unjust” (357b), he proposes to resurrect Thrasymachus' critique so that, in return, he may hear from Socrates a proper defense (358b-d).

He wishes to hear justice praised in a particular sort of way—the sort of way which one would need to use, it seems, in order to prove that being just is always personally more beneficial than being unjust. Before making his proposition, Glaucon describes for Socrates three different kinds of goods: those which we enjoy for their own sake, such as harmless pleasures; those which we like for their own sake, but also for their beneficial consequences, such as thinking, seeing, and being healthy; and, finally, those burdensome goods such as medical treatment, exercise, or money-making, things

²⁹¹ See, in this regard, Strauss 1964, p. 89.

which are painful or laborious in themselves, but which have beneficial consequences (357b-d). Glaucon and Socrates agree that according to popular opinion justice belongs among the third class of goods: burdensome but necessary for the wages and good reputation that comes from it. (This, we can imagine, is Cephalus' view.) Socrates, however, would if given the choice wish to class it among the second class, which he calls the "finest" (or most admirable, *kallistōi*) class (357d-358a).

Glaucon, as it turns out, wishes to have Socrates prove that it is part of the first class of goods—those choiceworthy for their own sake. In fact, however, he wishes Socrates to prove more than that. As he says, "I desire to hear what each [i.e., justice and injustice] is and what power it has all alone by itself when it is in the soul—dismissing its wages and its consequences" (358b). We know already that he wishes to have it proven that "it is in every way better to be just than unjust" (357b). If this is to be done by showing what power justice and injustice have in the soul regardless of their external consequences, then Glaucon's request amounts to asking Socrates to prove that the intrinsic benefits of justice are so great that no amount of external goods acquirable by injustice can outweigh the harm caused to the soul by injustice; likewise, he is asking Socrates to prove that no amount of external harm can outweigh the harm done to the soul by one's own injustice. What is more, it quickly becomes apparent that, in asking for this, Glaucon is to be talking about justice as it is ordinarily understood. He wishes, in other words, for Socrates to prove that the kind of justice that he did *not* defend (in *Republic*, Book One or the *Gorgias*) is truly the good condition of the soul (the kind of justice he *did* defend in both of those places) and that the good condition of the soul is the

only good decisive for happiness. This is the defense of justice that he has not yet heard (358d). And this is not surprising, since it requires proving that following the unswerving resolve never to harm another is the only way to one's own greatest good.²⁹²

As I said, in order to elicit the proper defense of justice, Glaucon offers to resurrect Thrasymachus' critique of it.²⁹³ In particular, he proposes to do three things. First, he will give an account of what people such as Thrasymachus say justice is and where it comes from. Then he will prove that everybody truly believes that injustice is more personally profitable than being just, and thus that nobody is just for its own sake but only out of compulsion. Finally, he will prove that "the life of the unjust man is...far better (*polu...ameinōn*) than that of the just man." Glaucon professes to believe none of this (358c-d).

His account of the origin and nature of justice (358e-359b) is substantially identical to that of Callicles.²⁹⁴ By nature it is far better to have more of the good things than to have a share equal to that of others. Getting more requires taking from others. Suffering such harm at the hands of another, on the other hand, is far worse than settling for an equal share. The majority of human beings are too weak to commit injustice while protecting themselves from suffering it at the hands of others. Hence they gather together and make laws and compacts (*nomous...kai sunthēkas*) where they mutually agree to refrain from doing injustice to one another. In this way, seeking to have more is

²⁹² Cf. Bloom 1991, p. 341, and Bruell 1994, p. 265. Irwin (1995, pp. 191-93) denies that the request is this extreme.

²⁹³ He notes in passing that this critique is not limited to Thrasymachus: he says he has been "talked deaf by Thrasymachus and countless others" in these matters (358c; cf. *Laws* 888d-890a). Glaucon is of the same class as Callicles (which can be inferred from the fact that Callicles courted Glaucon's step-brother), so no doubt both of them have been hearing such things from the same people.

²⁹⁴ See again *Gorgias* 483b-484b.

understood to be committing injustice (*to adikein*), and justice is understood to be equality or having a fair share (*to ison*, see 359c). Hence, what the law commands is called lawful and just (*nomimon te kai dikaion*). This path is the most profitable one available to those who are weak, but, in truth, we see that justice is a mean between what is truly best (committing injustice with impunity) and what is truly worst (suffering injustice without being able to avenge oneself). Further, justice is valued and honored only because most people are too weak to practice injustice successfully. Justice is not considered good in itself. Glaucon concludes by saying that “the man who is able to do [injustice] and is truly a man (*alēthōs andra*) would never set down a compact with anyone not to do injustice and not to suffer it. He’d be mad” (359b). It is not that such a man has a natural *right* to have more than the weaker (as Callicles claimed); it is simply that self-restraint is not in his interest.

The great strength of Glaucon’s argument concerning the origin and nature of justice is that it retains the most plausible parts of the critiques of justice delivered by Callicles and Thrasymachus while sharing neither of their weaknesses. Unlike Callicles, Glaucon does not try to tie the critique of justice to some incoherent notion of natural justice; he frankly asserts that justice is wholly conventional (358e-359a).²⁹⁵ Nor does he attempt to rely on an indiscriminate form of hedonism in order to justify the rejection of fairness (*to ison*); he simply, if generally, states that everyone thinks that having more of the good things is better (359c).

²⁹⁵ He thereby introduces to Thrasymachus’ account the distinction between nature and convention that Thrasymachus had avoided mentioning. The conventionality of justice was certainly implicit in the latter’s account, but he apparently saw no need to invoke the distinction between nature and convention in order to prove that justice is the advantage of the stronger.

Unlike Thrasymachus, he does not attempt to *define* justice as the advantage of the stronger, and therefore he is not forced to base his definition on some notion of “rulers in the precise sense.” Justice is fairness or equality (*to ison*) and it resides in the laws (the *nomoi*). For the most part, justice *is* advantageous for the weaker because any regime, to survive, must ensure that the ruled refrain from doing one another injustice. Even if the laws are systematically skewed towards the advantage of the ruling class (and Glaucon’s account certainly allows for this), the ruling class need not be infallible in its pronouncements. In other words, since justice is not defined as the advantage of the stronger, Cleitophon’s emendation to Thrasymachus’ account (340a-b) can be accepted while relying on the same facts of life that the latter relies on. Everyone, ruler and ruled alike, acts on an opinion of advantage. Some of those opinions are embodied in the law.

In sum, Glaucon’s definition of justice is immune from many of the tricks or strategies that Socrates has used against Calicles and Thrasymachus. Socrates will have to use a different strategy.

Glaucon’s proof that justice is practiced “unwillingly, from an incapacity to do injustice” (359b-360d), follows directly from his account of its nature. It is in this context that he offers his famous account of Gyges’ Ring (359d-360b). He intends this story to illustrate the proposition that anyone, just or unjust, would actively pursue injustice if he could be ensured of immunity from punishment or reprisal and thus had “license (*exousian*) to do whatever he wants” (359c). This is because everybody by nature considers “getting the better” (*pleonexia*) to be good and honors equality (*to ison*)

only because of the compulsion of the law.²⁹⁶ Given Gyges' ring, the just man would seize whatever he could of what belongs to others. He would take what he wanted without respect to ownership, go wherever he wanted likewise. He would sleep with whomever he wanted, kill whomever he wanted, and, if he wished, he would release others from jail (360b-c). In short, he would do all of the things that Polus and Thrasymachus extolled the tyrant for being able to do.²⁹⁷ Glaucon infers all of this from that fact that everybody believes that injustice is far more to their private advantage than justice, since they do it whenever they think they can get away with it (360c-d).²⁹⁸ Hence, if a person were to obtain the power of Gyges' ring yet refrained from injustice, he would certainly be publicly praised (since people praise justice and blame injustice in order to deter others from committing injustice against them), but privately these same people would consider him a most wretched fool (*athliōtatos* and *anoētōtatos*, 360d).

As noted, Glaucon here relies on the same common beliefs that Polus and Thrasymachus had when arguing the superior happiness of the tyrant, and he also invokes Callicles' explanation of the discrepancy between the praise of justice and the envy of the unjust (cf. *Gorgias* 483e-484a, 492a-b). Socrates himself confirms that, according to popular opinion, justice is good only for its wages (see, again, 358a), so one must infer that Socrates would agree that Glaucon's thought experiment correctly applies to most

²⁹⁶ He is even more emphatic: "We would catch the just man red-handed going the same way as the unjust man out of a desire to get the better (*dia tēn pleonexian*); this is what any nature naturally pursues as good, while it is law which by force perverts it [i.e., nature] to honor equality" (*tēn tou isou timēn*, 359c).

²⁹⁷ See *Gorgias* 466b-c, 468e, 469c, 471a-d and *Republic* 343e-344c, 348d.

²⁹⁸ He is no doubt referring to the same phenomena that Thrasymachus was referring to when he argued that the just man everywhere has less than the unjust man (343d-e).

individuals.²⁹⁹ All of this follows from the popular estimation of the substance of human happiness: having as much as possible of “the good things”—primarily pleasure and wealth.³⁰⁰ As in the *Gorgias* and the first book of the *Republic*, if Socrates wishes to prove that the popular opinion is mistaken, he will have to give an account of the human good that reveals goods higher than what are commonly considered “the good things.” In Socratic parlance, he will have to show that the “the good condition of the soul” is necessary (and perhaps sufficient) for happiness. We have already noted that the proofs offered in the *Gorgias* (504b-d, 506c-508c) and the first book of the *Republic* (347e-354c) were incomplete at best.³⁰¹

Glaucon concludes by describing and comparing the lives of the perfectly just and the perfectly unjust in order to show that the perfectly unjust man lives a far better life (360e-362c). He starts by describing the nature of perfect injustice (360e-361b). The perfectly unjust man is like clever craftsmen (*deinoi dēmiourgoi*) who knows what he is capable of achieving and what incapable and attempts only what he is capable of, and who, further, knows how to recover if he nonetheless slips up. Thus the perfectly unjust man will commit only those acts that he knows he can get away with. The perfectly unjust man need not be a tyrant. It suffices for him to commit injustice in every instance where he can get away with it. More generally, the perfectly unjust man will cultivate a

²⁹⁹ In this context it is worth comparing *Republic* 619b-d.

³⁰⁰ Cf. *Gorgias* 466b-c, 486c-d, 491e-492d.

³⁰¹ To recall, Socrates established the paramount importance of the good condition of the soul only by refuting Callicles’ insincere assertion that happiness lay wholly in the enjoyment of any pleasure whatsoever (*Gorgias* 494e-495c; cf. 499b). He then identified this good condition of the soul with lawfulness, moderation, and justice without any serious opposition from Callicles and without having to prove that the lawfulness, moderation, and justice to which he was referring were the same as what those three things are commonly taken to be (504b-d).

reputation for justice (so as to enjoy all the benefits that flow from this reputation) while committing in private as many injustices as he can get away with (thereby enjoying the benefits of injustice.) He will have power sufficient to protect himself should he get in trouble. He will speak persuasively and, when need be, he will be able to use force, since he is courageous and strong and has many friends to help him.

As for the just man “perfect in his own pursuit”^{360e}), “simple and noble” (*haploun kai gennaion*, 361b) Glaucon insists that he should be stripped of his reputation for justice (361b-d). If he were reputed to be just, he would enjoy the “honors and gifts” that follows from that reputation. In that case, one could not know if he chose to be just for its own sake or for its wages. Hence, his attachment to justice must be tested by having him go through life with a reputation for great injustice, suffering all of the consequences of that reputation.

Comparing their respective lives (361d-362c), Glaucon shows that the just man would be most wretched while the unjust man would be happiest of all. The just man (and his family before his eyes) will suffer all of the horrible punishments cities reserve for doers of injustice: imprisonment, torture, gruesomely painful execution. His actual justice does nothing to protect him from these greatest of evils, since he lacks the reputation for justice. The unjust man, on the other hand, pursues the good in light of the truth that justice, without the reputation for justice, is useless, while the reputation for justice, accompanied by the covert practice of injustice, is extremely profitable. Thanks to his reputation (and, implicitly, his virtue, 361b), he will hold high office. He will bind his family to other prominent families by marriage. Thanks to his reputation, he will

engage in whatever contracts or enterprises he pleases with his fellow citizens. He will enjoy all the lawful benefits of these, but he will, in addition, enjoy all the *unlawful* benefits as well, since he will cheat whenever he can. As a result, he will always come off the better in public and private undertakings. Thanks to his wealth and power he will have many friends whom he can keep loyal through his rewards, and thus he will also be able to “get the better of his enemies” (*pleonektein tōn echtrōn*, 362b). Finally, he will enjoy the good favor of the gods because his wealth will enable him to make great sacrifices to them.

Glaucon’s account of consummate injustice has two distinct advantages. First, it relies in no way on the notion of ruling as an art strictly speaking (360e-361b, 362a-c). He retains simply the notion of perfect injustice as the ability to commit great injustice without suffering the penalty. This requires great virtue and intelligence, but the reasoning concerning artisans and art do not necessarily apply. His account cannot, therefore, fall prey to Socrates’ use of the arts analogy as Thrasymachus’ did. The second strength is to show that one need not be a tyrant in order to enjoy the great fruits of injustice. If one is more outwardly restrained and inwardly clever, one can reap benefits that a tyrant, who must rely on force, cannot always enjoy. Otherwise put, one could enjoy the fruits of tyranny without having to rule “tyrannically”—provided one is clever and virtuous. In this way, Glaucon incorporates the valid insights about the limited need for justice that Socrates alluded to in his second refutation of Thrasymachus (at 350e-352d).

In sum, Glaucon reduces the problem of justice to its essence and forcefully presents the alternative between justice and injustice when these are conceived of in accordance with ordinary opinion. Happiness consists in the possession and enjoyment of good things (primarily bodily and external goods). The more good things one has, the better. If one can avoid retribution, it is therefore more profitable to seize for oneself what belongs to others than it is to be just and self-restrained. Not justice but the reputation for justice is profitable. Everybody secretly believes this and practices justice only out of weakness or compulsion or for the rewards that attend a reputation for justice. The strong therefore have no reason to abide by justice, since justice is against nature and their natural good and they can achieve greater happiness by refusing to honor the demands of justice in cases where they can do without detection or punishment.

All of this rests on the basic understanding of justice as fairness or equality (*to ison*), which, practically speaking, amounts to obeying the law, respecting others' property, and harming no one (except in self-defense). The basic understanding of injustice, accordingly, is seizing good things for oneself at the expense of others. We argued at the conclusion of the previous chapter that all the interlocutors so far have had this basic conception of justice and injustice. Our first major conclusion, therefore, is that Plato, in the *Gorgias* and in the *Republic*, consistently presents the same understanding of justice underlying the opinions of Socrates' interlocutors: fairness or equality (*to ison*). The Socratic defense of justice must be understood in light of this. In particular, we may note again that the Socratic defense of justice requires an expansion or redefinition of the common conception of the human good, since, as we saw, the common

conception of the good supports the critics of justice more than the defenders. This reconception of the good will have to show that the good condition of the soul is necessary for happiness (and that *pleonexia* is incompatible with the good condition of the soul).

1.2. Adeimantus (362d-367e)

Glaucón's critique of justice is complemented by that of Adeimantus.

Adeimantus' speech is a systematic exposition of the incoherencies in the traditional or respectable accounts of justice and its rewards. As such, it shows quite clearly how the critique of justice arises from reflection on ordinary opinions, and it shows why an intelligent and capable person might, on reflection, doubt the goodness of justice. In fact, he offers the speech partly in order to show Socrates why someone like Glaucón, who still admires justice, nonetheless feels that it lacks a sufficient defense (362b, 365a-b). It is authoritative opinion itself which sows the first seeds of doubt about justice.

In the speech he lays out the praises and blames commonly attached to justice and injustice (362e-363e), and then goes on to describe other speeches (by poets and others) particularly about virtue and the gods (363e-365a). He argues that, on the basis of these traditional opinions, a person of capacity and talent who cares about living well would conclude that the happiest life is reserved for the one who cultivates the appearance of justice while secretly being unjust whenever he can (365a-366b). Only a truly adequate defense of the claim that, regardless of their external effects, injustice "is the greatest of

evils a soul can have in it, and justice the greatest good,” could convince someone to be willingly just (365b-367a). He implores Socrates to present this defense (367a-e).

The first part of Adeimantus’ speech is concerned with showing how traditional opinions and authorities serve to confirm what Glaucon has already said. Parents and poets praise justice, but always for its rewards: good reputation leading to marriages, offices, and general prosperity (362e-363a). The gods, too, reward justice in this manner in life, and in death they reward the just with eternal leisure and (according to some) inebriation. Meanwhile the unjust are reproached and punished in life, and then punished more in death (363a-e). Moderation and justice are praised as noble, but it is acknowledged that intemperance and injustice are, in themselves, more pleasant (though shameful) and that injustice is more profitable than justice for the most part (363e-364a). What is more, the unjust are honored and considered happy if they have achieved worldly success and prominence, while those who are virtuous but weak and poor are ignored (364a). Most striking of all, perhaps, poetic authorities contradict the claim that the gods consistently reward justice and punish injustice. Sometimes they allot suffering to a good man or prosperity to a bad man. Further, there are several ways (private or public sacrifices, and so forth) by which unjust individuals and cities can persuade the gods not to punish them here or in the afterlife for their injustices. The gods, in short, are bribable.³⁰² (One can even persuade gods to send harm to one’s rivals, whether or not one’s rivals deserve it.) According to traditional authorities, then, justice does not have a

³⁰² One may note that this part of his speech shows another way in which great wealth could be useful to “an intelligent man”; cf. 331b

reliable divine sanction. This may explain why, in discussing justice, Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus were all silent about the gods while praising injustice.

The conclusions to be drawn from this are obvious: injustice is intrinsically profitable, while justice is not profitable unless one also has the reputation for justice. Anyone who truly cared about living as best as possible, and who had the resources and capacity to pursue that life, would therefore cultivate the appearance of justice while committing injustice whenever it can be done successfully (365a-c). It may be objected that such a life would be very difficult to lead successfully, but, Adeimantus replies, no great endeavor is easy. Enlisting friends and comrades for help and learning rhetoric in order to persuade assemblies and courts, one can arrange it so that, whether by persuasion or force, one can “get the better” without paying the penalty (365c-d). If it be objected that the gods cannot be evaded in this manner and will send bad fortune to the unjust, Adeimantus responds with a trilemma: either the gods do not exist; or they exist but do not care about human beings; or, if they exist and care about human beings, what we know about them comes from the very poets (and laws) that tell us also that the gods can be bribed. So, if one believes the authorities, the best course of action is to reap the profits of injustice and use part of those profits to assuage the gods.³⁰³ The same can be done to avoid punishment in the afterlife (365d-366b).

Hence “the speech of both the many and the eminent” confirms that the best life is one of seeming justice and actual injustice, and there is no other account that has yet been offered that contradicts it successfully (366b). Therefore, he adds, if these speeches are

³⁰³ If one believes the authorities and refrains from injustice, one’s only reward is negative: not being punished.

false, the person who knows them to be false will not be angry at those who are unjust, but will pity them. No one who has been taught what they have been taught would willingly be just, but only out of weakness or cowardice (365c-d). All praises of justice have been praises of “the reputations, honors, and gifts” that result from it; no one has ever adequately proven that injustice is the greatest evil the soul can suffer and justice the greatest good it can possess. If such an account had been developed and taught, “each would be his own best guard,” avoiding doing justice and not fearful that others will do it to him (since they believe as he does) (366e-367a).

Adeimantus concludes by imploring Socrates to deliver just such an account. In doing so, he must leave out the reputations and external consequences of justice and injustice. If he cannot show that justice is the greatest of goods for the soul, “fruitful by its own nature and not by opinion” (*gonima tēi houtōn phusie all’ ou doxēi*), regardless of its further consequences, then Thrasymachus is correct and justice is someone else’s good and injustice is most profitable (367a-e).

Adeimantus’ speech shows that popular and authoritative opinion lack the resources to prove that it is always better to be just than to be unjust. Like our other conclusions, this one appears rather obvious, but Adeimantus has provided some necessary evidence that had been lacking: the speeches on the gods by poets and other authorities. If justice were reliably rewarded and injustice punished, then one could retain the ordinary understanding of the “good things” yet still argue that it is always better to be just than to be unjust. The facts of life are enough to show that human justice is fallible. In the figure of Cephalus we saw someone powerfully moved by the thought

of divine sanctions, but who nonetheless expressed doubt regarding their existence. (As a youth he simply laughed off the notion, (330d-e). With Adeimantus we finally get a resume of what the greatest of the poets have said regarding divine sanctions, and we learn one especially important thing: the gods can be bribed. Since these bribes consist of external goods which can be gotten by injustice, we see that, according to traditional opinion, not only are divine sanctions not consistently reliable but that successful, large-scale injustice is perhaps the best means to receiving divine favor.³⁰⁴ Popular piety turns out to add rather than diminish support for the case for injustice.

1.3. Conclusion

The brothers have given Socrates a specific yet daunting task. Socrates must prove that justice is the greatest good a person can have and injustice the greatest evil.³⁰⁵ He must do so by abstracting entirely from any rewards which justice might receive in the way of honor or wealth. The ordinary “good things” must be left out completely and only the state of the soul considered.³⁰⁶ What is more, Socrates must argue on the basis of reason and nature alone, since traditional authorities have shown themselves to be insufficient. Although, formally speaking, Socrates’ last refutation of Thrasymachus (352d-354a) provided a model of just such an argument, we (and they) noted that it was too formal to be convincing. What is more, Socrates himself declared it insufficient

³⁰⁴ Glaucon had hinted at this; see 362c.

³⁰⁵ This is, of course, what Socrates attempted to prove in the *Gorgias*. It should not be surprising, then, if some of the same arguments or ways of arguing reappear in Socrates’ response here.

³⁰⁶ To the extent that the good things do enter in, it is negatively: the brothers’ demands implies that Socrates must prove that no amount of the good things is enough to make up for the evil suffered in the soul from being unjust.

(354a-c), since it assumed that justice is human virtue, but they had never defined what justice is, so they had no warrant for asserting that it was human virtue.

Related to this, we see that they are not explicitly asking Socrates for a definition of justice. In their requests, they seem to be asking Socrates to prove that justice, as it is ordinarily conceived of (*to ison*) is always more profitable than injustice. Socrates has, for the most part, encouraged this assumption. Although his conversation with Polemarchus might have hinted at the possibility that the ordinary understanding would need to be radically revised (if justice were to be a true virtue, see 335b-d), Socrates did nothing of the sort when defending justice against Thrasymachus' attacks. He thereby left the impression, at least, that he was defending justice as ordinarily understood. And it is not surprising that Glaucon and Adeimantus found this defense wanting, since Socrates showed nothing concrete concerning how justice as ordinarily conceived of is necessary for living well. (Nor did Socrates say anything concrete about what living well consists of.)

Upon reflection, one sees that, even if they are not explicitly asking for a redefinition of justice, they are asking for something much more important. In truth, they are asking Socrates for an account of the human good as a whole, one that articulates and incorporates the goods of the soul and gives them priority. Their request requires this because it is clear that, if happiness consists entirely in the goods they refer to as the "wages" of justice, then they have already proven that injustice is superior to justice. As I have already remarked, *only* a revision or expansion of the conception of the good has a chance of proving that justice as ordinarily conceived of, is more profitable than injustice.

Socrates would still have the task, however, of showing how ordinary justice is related to the human good or the good of the soul. How or whether justice serves the true human good is the question.

2. Socrates' Defense of Justice

In this last section I will present, in broad outline, Socrates' response to Glaucon and Adeimantus. My goal is limited. My chief concern will be to show that Socrates in the *Republic* follows the same basic strategy for defining and defending justice that he did in the *Gorgias*, with the same questionable associations and significant omissions. By seeing this we learn that, according to Plato, there is only one true way to respond to the problem, though, in both cases, he withholds presenting demonstratively the most important parts. Finally, we will see that the *Republic's* defense, although following the same basic strategy, is in one respect more complete by revealing the place of philosophy and the philosophic life in the defense of justice.

2.1. The City (II-IV)

Having agreed to accept the brothers' challenge, Socrates proposes that they proceed by building a city in speech, on the grounds that it would be easier to see what justice is in an individual soul if one first saw it in something larger (368a-369b).³⁰⁷ The fact that they will build a city *in speech* is a concession to Thrasymachus. Socrates has already admitted that most actual rulers are self-interested (347d). Socrates would not be

³⁰⁷ Socrates will later attempt to prove that the analogy between city and soul is valid (see 434d-441e), but for now it is an assumption.

able to defend justice if he were to base the understanding of it on the practice of any actually-existing city.³⁰⁸ We will look at the main parts of the building of the city, since it provides the model from which Socrates will draw the definition of justice.

The building of the city moves through three stages before Socrates returns to the topic of justice. Underlying every version of the city are two basic premises. First, human beings form political communities because they are not individually sufficient to meet all of their needs. Hence they form cooperative partnerships with others, and this forms the basis for the city. The motive for becoming a citizen is self-interest.³⁰⁹ The second premise holds for the city that Socrates and the brothers will construct, but not for any actual city. In the city they are building, each citizen will practice only one art (369e-370c). Each citizen will practice the art for which he is most naturally suited, and he will practice only that art so that he may have sufficient time to devote to it that he can become as excellent as possible in its practice. The various citizens will then exchange with each other in order to get what they need. With these premises in place, they build the city.

The first version of the city (369a-372c) proves inadequate because it is based on the false premises that the minimal bodily needs for adequate food, shelter, and clothing are the only human needs, and that the inhabitants of the city recognize this and act on

³⁰⁸ For why they are *building* a city in speech, rather than merely presenting one, consult Bruell 1994.

³⁰⁹ This does not mean that self-interest dictates that one be a *just* member of the community: that question is precisely what is at stake. No one would deny that it is profitable to be able to take care of the various advantages made possible by social and economic cooperation.

it.³¹⁰ They are so moderate that the problem of justice does not even arise. Glaucon rebels against the city in the name of the human desires or needs that go beyond mere bodily necessity. Socrates therefore agrees to build a second version of the city, a “luxurious city” (372d-373c). Because this city will need to go to war to acquire enough land to meet its needs, and because each citizen in the city must practice only one art, it turns out that the city will be in need of a professional standing army (373d-374e).³¹¹ In this manner, Socrates begins to re-approach the problem of justice. A standing army presents an obvious threat to the citizenry. For the army to protect without exploiting their own city, “they must be gentle to their own and cruel to enemies” (375c).³¹² But how to make them gentle? What will keep these men, who have all of the true power in the city, from turning on their fellow citizens and exploiting them?

Socrates turns to education in order to show how to produce public-spirited soldiers (now assumed to be rulers and called “guardians,” 376c). The discussion of education (376c-412b) is long and we need not discuss its details. We need note only its principle. All of the aspects of the education are aimed at producing warriors who will be gentle towards one another and their fellow citizens while being willing to subordinate their own good to the good of the city as a whole (most importantly, by risking death in

³¹⁰ Cf. 558d-559d 571a-572b for more on the “necessary” desires. There are other unrealistic premises; cf. Bloom 1991, p. 346. Also, as Bloom (1991, p. 345) remarks, little about the soul could be learned from observing this city, since it seems to recognize only the body.

³¹¹ As we shall see, the principle of one man, one art will change in the course of the discussion. Initially it applies to all professions. Later it is used to distinguish basic classes in the city: the producers, the army/police, and the rulers.

³¹² Socrates thereby recognizes the political necessity of Polemarchus’ definition of justice; see Strauss 1964, p. 73. The recognition of this necessity does not, however, do away with the objections to it. It will still be true that that army will have to harm good men if those men are enemies.

defense of the city, 387b).³¹³ The education is *not* aimed deliberately at making the guardians happy (as Socrates admits at 420b-421c). Hence, one cannot conclude that the civic virtue with which they are instilled is human virtue as such.³¹⁴ Their virtues are certainly relative to their work (cf. 352d-353d), but that work is described in specifically political, not natural, terms.³¹⁵ In conjunction with this, the tales and speeches they are told about the gods, the heroes, and virtue (see 376e-392c) deliberately exclude the kinds of claims that Adeimantus had shown to render the goodness of justice questionable, such as that the gods cause evil or can be bribed (see 379a-383c).³¹⁶ Such claims (and others) are not proven false, but are rejected because it would be dangerous for guardians to believe them. The goal is not to teach them the truth but to give them the kind of character that makes them hate and love the right things, where the right things are determined with reference to their function as defenders of the city (see 402a). In the process of doing this, Socrates notes that they have “purged” the city (or at least the rulers) of their taste for luxuries (399e). As in the city of sows, then, moderation serves as a basis for justice.³¹⁷

With education of the guardians complete, Socrates next describes the regime that the city will have: its rulers and the principles of its laws (412b-427c). The preeminent qualification for the ruler, besides prudence, is that he be public-spirited, loving the city

³¹³ See Strauss 1964, p. 97.

³¹⁴ Socrates will later admit with respect to courage that their virtues are of a *political* sort, and are not virtues simply (see 430c). Given the fact that their virtues are aimed at preserving the territory, goods, and citizens of their city, it is therefore not surprising when Socrates later says (at 518d-e) that what commonly passes for virtue has more to do with the body than the soul; cf. Bruell 1994, p. 271.

³¹⁵ Glaucon notes that even the medical art is “statesmanlike” in this city (see 407e).

³¹⁶ See Bloom 1991, p. 351.

³¹⁷ See Bloom 1991, p. 364.

and completely identifying his own good with its well-being (412d-e). Those guardians will be chosen as rulers who show that they maintain this love in the face of every kind of test and temptation to abandon it (412e-413d). These rulers will be called “complete guardians,” and the warriors will be auxiliaries. We see, then, that the criterion for leadership is not that the rulers be the best all-around human beings, but that they be the most fiercely public-spirited and the most capable of discerning and supplying the needs of the city. It is not proven that the rulers will, on account of their public-spirit and justice and virtue, be happiest. Indeed, their complete self-identification with the well-being of the city is a *political* necessity. It is not proven that this identification is reasonable for them with a view to their own good.

It turns out that even this education and these tests are not enough to reliably produce fully-dedicated leaders. Socrates implicitly recognizes that the desire for private happiness will remain and may gain the upper hand. Hence, he introduces further precautions to prevent the rulers from exploiting the ruled. First, he introduces his notorious “noble lies,” whose purpose is to increase civic devotion through the myth of autochthony, while easing the resentment the class-system might cause by giving it divine sanction (414b-415d; cf. 389b-c). Second, he strips the guardians of any remaining privacy that might induce them to put their own good ahead of that of the city (415d-417b). They will have no private property beyond what their job requires. They will receive their food from the citizens. They will be perpetually open to public scrutiny, dining together and being forbidden to bar others from entering their houses.

They will not be allowed to use or even touch money, nor will they be allowed to have secret storehouses where they might collect it. They will live entirely public lives.

When Adeimantus objects that these guardians will be miserable on account of everything they are deprived of (419a-420b), Socrates responds by finally openly saying that their happiness is *not* the object in view. The goal is the happiness of the whole city (420b-422a).³¹⁸ (Socrates does say, however, that he would not be surprised if they were happiest, 420b-c; cf. 465d). Adeimantus, as co-founder of the city, concurs with this goal, and the discussion moves on, and the construction of the city is (temporarily) completed.

We see, in sum, that this city has been constructed so as to have “rulers in the precise sense” (cf. 342e). The rulers will rule for the sake of the ruled and will not be tempted (to the extent that this is possible) to benefit themselves at the expense of the ruled. In other words, they will be just. It is not said, however, that their justice is the whole of happiness, nor is it proven that their virtues ensure their personal happiness, nor is it proven that their particular virtues are human virtue as such. They are dedicated to the city; we do not know, as yet, if they are happy.

2.2. Virtues (IV)

With the building of the city complete, they turn back to the question of justice. At this point a crucial step is made in the search for justice. Glaucon agrees that since their city is correctly founded, it must be perfectly good, and, since it is perfectly good, it

³¹⁸ For a pointed objection to Socrates’ reasoning, see Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.5.27-28

is wise, courageous, moderate, and just (427e). Glaucon, in other words, agrees here, without proof, that justice is good—precisely what he had questioned before. He thereby begs the question.³¹⁹ (He also assumes that these four virtues, and these alone, constitute perfect goodness in such a way that, once the other three are found, what is “left over” will be justice, 427e-428a).³²⁰ On the basis of what came before, one may conclude, in fact, that Glaucon thinks that this city is perfectly good *because it is just*, for what is good about this city, as we have seen, is that it has rulers and warriors who are trained to be perfectly public-spirited and to rule for the sake of the ruled.³²¹

Socrates and Glaucon have little trouble discovering the city’s wisdom, courage, and moderation. The city is wise because the rulers possess good counsel concerning how the city as a whole can be best governed with respect to itself and other cities (428a-429a). The city as a whole is wise on account of a part of itself. The city is also courageous on account of a part of itself: the warrior class (429a-430c). They preserve throughout all tests and dangers the opinions transmitted to them by the lawgiver through their education about what is truly terrible (see 386a-388e). Since these opinions are relative to the needs of the city and not of the individual, Socrates cautions Glaucon to call this “political” courage, not courage simply (430c).³²² After wisdom and courage comes moderation (430c-432b). Unlike the other two, the city is called moderate not on account of a part of it but on account of the relations between the parts. Since moderation involves the mastery of the worse desires and pleasures by the better, the city is moderate

³¹⁹ Cf. Strauss 1964, p. 107.

³²⁰ Cf. Pappas 2003, pp. 77-78.

³²¹ See Bloom 1991, p. 372.

³²² Socrates does not say it, of course, but the same holds for the other virtues of the city.

because the simple and moderate desires of the rulers and auxiliaries rule those of the large, variegated multitude (430e-431d).³²³ In addition, the city's moderation is a kind of order and harmony since everyone in the city (that is, all three classes) shares the same opinion concerning who should rule and who should be ruled (431d-e).

Justice proves less easy to discern (432b-434c).³²⁴ Socrates begins by saying that, in his opinion, justice is "a certain form of" the principle that they laid down when they began to found the city: "each one [of the citizens] must practice one of the functions in the city, that one which his nature made him naturally most fit" (433a). Socrates equates the observance of this principle with the practice of "minding one's own business" (*to ta hautou prattein*) and not being a busybody—a commonly heard definition of justice. Socrates then proves in three ways that the city's justice resides in each citizen minding his own business. First, they had set down before that, once wisdom, courage, and moderation were found, what would be left over would be justice; but each citizen minding his own business (or each class minding its own business and not that of another class) is what is left over; it supplies the "power" that brings the city into being and preserves it (433b-c). Second, the power derived from each citizen minding his own business provides a benefit to the city that rivals those supplied by the rulers' wisdom, the auxiliaries' courage, and the moderation of the whole citizenry; but justice is a rival to wisdom, courage, and moderation; therefore, each citizen minding his own business again is justice (433c-e). Finally, Socrates notes that the rulers, in judging lawsuits, will make

³²³ Note here that the moderation of the individual is used to determine the moderation of the city.

³²⁴ Bloom (1991, p. 374) suggests that this is because justice is superfluous in this city. Wisdom, courage, and moderation suffice to account for all three classes doing their work in harmony, and that seems to constitute the life of the city.

sure that “no one have what belongs to others, nor be deprived of what belongs to him,” because this state of affairs is just; so, again, “the having and doing of one’s own and what belongs to oneself” (*hē tou oikeiou te kai heautou hexis te kai praxis*) turns out to be justice (433e-434a).³²⁵ Socrates concludes by gaining Glaucon’s assent that meddling among the three classes would be “the greatest harm for the city,” but, since “the greatest evil-doing against one’s own city is injustice,” it turns out yet again that minding one’s own business is justice. When Glaucon agrees, however, Socrates warns him not to assert this “so positively” until they determine whether the definition holds for an individual too (434a-d).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this definition is that moderation and justice would seem to be the same thing. The definition of justice implies the practice of all the other virtues, since a city would be wise only if the rulers were minding their own business, and the city would be courageous only if the warriors were doing theirs, and if each class is minding its own business, then the money-making class will be subordinate to the other two, and if none of them try to do another’s work, this implies that they all have the same opinion about who should rule and who be ruled. So justice implies the other three virtue—but it is especially similar to moderation. Each class would not mind its own business unless it was of the opinion that it ought; conversely, if each class is of the opinion that it ought to mind its own business, then it will do so. It is true that moderation (as Socrates has defined it) refers especially to opinions, while justice refers

³²⁵ This argument seems to assume that what is truly “one’s own” is determined by that person’s place in the city. Even if this is true, having “one’s own” in this city would be very different from what it would be in any ordinary city, where property is not distributed on this basis. To this extent, this argument criticizes the practice of justice in actual cities. At the same time, it does not prove that each citizen, performing his proper task in this city, is rendered happy thereby.

to practice; but, again, that opinion put in practice is justice, and the practice implies the opinion. Therefore, in the *Republic* as in the *Gorgias* justice and moderation have been conflated in the process of articulating and defending justice. Justice is never defended without moderation.

One might think that at this point Socrates would have an easy time defining the justice of the individual. If the justice of the city lies in each class doing its own work, would it not follow that the justice of the individual lies in doing the work that is assigned to him because of the class he belongs to (and to which he is naturally fit to belong)?³²⁶ Socrates does not take this path, however. Nor does he call attention to the fact that he does not take it. Rather, he argues that, if they are to use what they have learned in order to define the virtues of the individual, they must first prove that the structure of the soul is analogous to the structure of the city, which he proceeds to do (434d-441c).³²⁷ We need not go into the details of his proof. More important for our question is why he would proceed this way given the alternative just mentioned.

The most obvious reason rests on the purpose guiding the entire conversation. Remember that Socrates' ultimate task is not just to define justice but to defend its superior goodness, and to do this by proving that justice is such a great good in the soul that no amount of external goods can compensate, with respect to happiness, for the wretchedness of being unjust. It is not clear how defining justice in terms of one's function in a city could fulfill this task. Not only would this seem to leave out the goods

³²⁶ Cf. Bruell 1994, pp. 271-72.

³²⁷ For general treatments of the city-soul analogy and its function in the *Republic*'s argument, see Strauss 1964, pp. 109-11, Ferrari 2005, and Blossner 2007.

and ills of the soul in particular, but in the process of the construction of the city we saw that it is highly questionable whether performing one's duties is sufficient for happiness—especially in the case of the guardians, who are the most just of the citizens, since they rule for the sake of the ruled. In addition, by treating the individual as analogous *to* a city rather than as a part *of* it, Socrates will have an easier time showing how the practice of virtues such as justice and moderation can be beneficial to the individual rather than merely to others (since those others drop out in the same way that other cities are of little concern in the building of their city).

Socrates' proof of the three parts of the soul (the calculating, the spirited, and the desiring parts) finally brings the soul into view. This, again, is necessary for his task. It is remarkable, then, that Socrates himself declares their reasoning about the soul to be deficient in precision (at 435c-d; 504b). Even if Socrates' upcoming claims are based on genuine knowledge of the soul and its good, his explicit reasoning here is not sufficient to reveal it. This, of course, throws all of his definitions into doubt. That does not mean that they cannot be instructive or suggestive; but they are not demonstrative.³²⁸ Socrates' argument is based on the principle of non-contradiction: "the same thing won't be willing at the same time to do or suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing" (436b). With this principle in hand, Socrates proves the existence of a calculating and a desiring part in the soul. A person can desire something yet refrain from fulfilling that desire. By the principle of non-contradiction, the thing that desires cannot be identical to the thing that calculates; hence the soul has a calculating

³²⁸ The reasoning is already rendered doubtful by the assumption that there are four and only four virtues making up perfect goodness, as already noted.

and a desiring part (439a-d). These parts correspond to the rulers and to the producers.

Then Socrates proves the existence of a spirited part of the soul, corresponding to the auxiliaries (439d-441c). Spirit is not desire because a person can get angry at one's desires. On the other hand, spirit is not reason, because irrational beings also have spirit. (These arguments contain several questionable steps, but we need not examine them.)

Once he has uncovered the three parts of the soul, Socrates moves to the virtues of the individual (441c-444e). Since the individual has the same parts as the city, his virtues will be defined in the same way. He begins by asserting that, just as the city is just when each class minds its own business, "the one within whom each of the parts minds its own business will be just and mind his own business" (441d-e). Glaucon agrees with this, even though the meaning is obscure. Why, precisely, would a person who is just in this sense *also* "mind his business" in the ordinary sense of refraining from injustice (*pleonexia*), or, for that matter, perform his particular task in the city? Socrates does not explain at first, but moves on to the other three virtues.

An individual will be courageous when the spirited part in him minds its own business and preserves in the face of all tests what the speeches (*logoi*) have declared truly terrible (442c). (This need not be the same as what the law tells the warriors is truly terrible; cf. 429b-c with 442c). He is wise when the ruling and calculating part within him minds its own business and "possesses...the knowledge of that which is beneficial for each part and for the whole composed of the community of these parts" (442c). (Again, this knowledge need not be, and obviously is not, identical to the knowledge proper to the rulers; cf. 428d with 442c). And the individual is moderate when the ruling

and ruled parts in him are in harmony concerning what parts should rule (442c), with the better part keeping in check the manifold desires of the lower part (442a-b). (Again, this is clearly not the same as the moderation of the city; cf. 430e-432a with 442c-d).

In each of these cases, the virtues are defined solely with reference to the individual and his own good. And it should go without saying that the content of individual wisdom (the good of the individual and his parts) is wholly obscure, since, as Socrates has said (435c-d), their reasoning about the soul is insufficiently precise. Hence also the content of the speeches concerning what is truly terrible is unknown as well, since these would be the evils of the soul. Finally, even if a well-ordered soul is desirable and implies reason ruling appetite with the help of spirit, we do not know how such a person actually lives. All of his action that has been described so far is purely internal. It is not clear, then, why a person who has a soul where each part minds its own business will also “mind his own business” with respect to the task assigned to him in the city, refraining from seeking to have or do what belongs to another.³²⁹

Socrates does offer something of a proof on this score (442e-443b), measuring the just soul against the “vulgar standards” (*to phortika*) of justice. In truth, however, he merely gets Glaucon’s agreement (without argument) that a person whose soul is just will not filch deposits, rob temples, seal, betray comrades or cities, be faithless, commit adultery, neglect parents or the gods. This seems obvious to Glaucon, but it has not been

³²⁹ How psychic justice and ordinary justice relate is one of the biggest questions that the *Republic* gives rise to. Sachs 1963 is the classic statement of the claim that Socrates fails to prove the mutual implication of these two types of justice and thus commits the “fallacy of irrelevance.” For responses, see Vlastos 1968 and Annas 1981, ch. 6. See also Bloom 1991, p. 378, and Irwin 1995, pp. 256-61.

proven.³³⁰ Indeed, it seems strange that he should treat the justice of the soul as the true justice, and these other examples as instances derived from vulgar sources. One could assert to the contrary that it is “vulgar” justice which is the true justice. We have seen repeatedly that justice, as commonly and intuitively conceived, has to do with bodily and external goods, as well as with the needs of the city (to preserve internal peace and external security, and so forth). Socrates has been able to present the good order of the soul as justice only through his questionable analogy of city and soul. The ordered harmony of the soul’s parts (or desires or what have you) may be of the highest importance for happiness, but without the analogy, there is no reason to call this harmony “justice.” One might with equal reason call it moderation, as Socrates did in the *Gorgias*.³³¹

Having established that true justice consists in minding one’s own business and making sure that the parts of one’s soul mind their own business, Socrates then asserts that, for the person just in this sense, the justice or injustice of external actions is determined not with reference to that action’s effects on others, but rather with reference to whether the actions are conducive or detrimental to the good ordering of the soul (443d-444a). Any action which produces or preserves this order is just (and any practice that does so is noble, see 443e, 444e). It is unclear whether these just actions are identical with what the law ordinarily declares just, and, if they are, it is certainly unclear why this would be the case. Why does theft or murder necessarily disfigure the soul? We have here another parallel with the *Gorgias*, since we were left with the same

³³⁰ See Pappas 2007, p. 97.

³³¹ See *Gorgias* 504b-d, 506e-507c; cf. *Republic* 441d, 442c-d, 443c-d.

questions regarding Socrates' defense of the lawful and just there (see 504b-d). Socrates did not define law, the lawful, or the just with reference to what they are ordinarily taken to be. He invited his audience to assume an identity he did not, in fact, establish. The same holds here in the *Republic*.

Finally, as in the *Gorgias* (504b, 506c-507a), Socrates sums up his account by calling justice the health, beauty, and good condition of the soul, and injustice sickness, ugliness and weakness (444c-e).³³² (He even says it is better to be punished for injustice than to get away with it; see 444e-445a; cf. *Gorgias* 476a-479e, 504a-505b). With these considerations in place, Glaucon thinks it is obvious that justice is always more profitable than injustice, noting that a corrupt body seems to make life unlivable, regardless of what external goods one has. How, then, could life be livable with a corrupt soul, when the soul is the "very thing by which we live" (445a-b)? Socrates insists, nonetheless, that the comparison of the just and unjust lives must be made, though he is interrupted before he can do so (see 449a-b). We might add that a comparison is especially necessary, since Socrates has said nothing yet about the *kind* of life the truly just person leads: what ends he pursues and by what means.

We have noted many strange aspects of Socrates' treatment of justice. Justice in the soul may issue in vulgarly just actions, but the demands of psychic justice are unrelated, in the first place, to the needs of the body or of the city, while the demands of vulgar justice are. Action in accord with psychic justice do not appear to have any essential reference to or direct concern with our obligations to others. If Socrates truly

³³² Cf. Irwin 1995, p. 255.

means what he says, then the link between true justice and vulgar justice must lie in the nature of the good sought and enjoyed by the truly just man. It is simplest to assume that the just soul is also vulgarly just because the well-ordered soul simply does not want the things that lead people to commit injustice.³³³ The radical implication of this thought is that good condition of soul is sufficient for happiness, so that the goods of body and property have no effect on one's happiness.³³⁴ That being so, the just soul has nothing to gain by doing injustice in the ordinary sense and nothing to lose by suffering injustice in the ordinary sense. In addition, Socrates must also imply that a person who commits injustice necessarily has a poorly ordered soul, and that doing injustice (in the ordinary sense) causes damage to the soul. This last claim would be difficult to prove. Without sufficient knowledge of the soul, it must be taken only as an assertion.

In sum, Socrates has succeeded in defining justice in a manner that makes it possible for justice to live up to the demands that Glaucon and Adeimantus have placed on it. The price of this success is that Socrates' justice is very different from, and obscurely related to, justice as it is ordinarily conceived. In particular, it is defined by reference to the needs of the soul, while justice as ordinarily conceived is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with bodily and external goods (as it is, for example, in the city they have built). So, as in the *Gorgias*, the account of justice presupposes an account of the good that transcends the common conceptions of the good. Despite all this, Socrates presents what he has proven as a vindication of ordinary justice as well.

³³³ See Bloom 1991, pp. 378-79; cf. pp. 395-96.

³³⁴ This had also been the suggestion of the *Gorgias*; see, for example, *Gorgias* 512c-513c.

2.3. The Philosopher and the Good (V-VII)

Socrates' proposal to compare the lives of the just and the unjust is deferred by demands to hear more about the regime (449a-c). This demand ushers in the core of the *Republic*: Books V-VII, containing discussions sexual equality, the communism of women and children, the rule of philosophers, the nature and corruption of philosophers, their place in the cities, and the education they would receive.³³⁵ The definition of justice does not depend on any of these discussions. The defense of justice, on the other hand, greatly depends on one theme that is developed in these central books: philosophy (474c-541b). As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the strategy of the *Republic*'s defense of justice differs from that of the *Gorgias* in two chief ways: the account of the tripartite soul (discovered with the aid of the city-soul analogy); and the account of philosophy. The *Gorgias* had not been completely silent about philosophy, but it said little about what philosophy is besides claiming that philosophy declares that it is worse to do than to suffer injustice and that it is better to pay the penalty for one's injustice, if one commits injustice, than to get away with it unpunished.³³⁶ It did not, however, base its defense of justice on the nature and goodness of philosophy. The *Republic* does just that. Socrates uses the account of the tripartite soul, informed by the discussion of philosophy, to prove the superiority of justice to injustice. He also manages to provide a partial vindication of ordinary, law-abiding justice—something he failed to do in the

³³⁵ The discussion of the corruption of philosophers contains an indictment of the false standards of the many (492a-492d) that bears comparison with *Gorgias* 510a-511a, 517c-519b. Socrates goes so far as to call the many "the biggest sophists," and he compares them to a "great strong beast" (493a). He later on stresses the incoherence of common opinions about the just and the noble; see 538c-539a.

³³⁶ See *Gorgias* 481c-482c, 500c-d, 521d-522c, and (especially) 526c.

Gorgias. We thereby see the limits of Socrates' ability to defend the ordinary conception of justice.

After he argues that sexual equality and communism of women and children are necessary in order to make the city as good as possible (449a-466d), Socrates is compelled to reveal the fact that this city could only come into being if it were ruled by philosophers, and he is further compelled to defend this claim (471c-474c). It turns out that the city must be ruled by philosophers for two fundamental reasons. First, only philosophers have the combination of virtue and knowledge necessary to govern a city as well as possible.³³⁷ Second, only philosophers can rule solely for the sake of the ruled, because they are the only ones who think that political rule will bring them no positive benefits.³³⁸ True philosophers are devoted entirely to the pursuit and contemplation of the truth, which is to be found, according to Socrates, in the world of purely intelligible forms (474c-480a, 516c-e); the sensible world is a cave of delusion and ignorance (509c-511c). In the midst of the "madness" that pervades life in the cities (that is, ordinary life), true philosophers choose to live private lives, minding their own business and staying out of public affairs.³³⁹ However, as just noted, Socrates argues that the philosophers are needed in the city he and the brothers are building.³⁴⁰

This leads to a lengthy discussion of the education the city must institute in order to rear philosophers (502c-540a). The *Republic*'s famous images of the sun, line, and cave (507a-521b) all appear in the context of the philosophic education. In particular,

³³⁷ On their virtues, see 485a-487a, and the subsequent defense (487a-496a); on their knowledge, see 503e-506b; cf. 507a-511e (esp. 511b-c); see also 531d-535a, 537d-539c.

³³⁸ See 520a-e, 521b, 540a-b; cf. 347a-e.

³³⁹ 496a-e; cf. 549c, 550a-b; contrast *Gorgias* 500c-d, 521d-522c; but cf. *Apology* 31c-33a.

³⁴⁰ For the particular reasons, consult the passages cited in footnote 47 above.

Socrates proposes these images as a poetic way of showing Glaucon and Adeimantus the importance of the subject at the peak of that education: the idea (or form, *idea*) of the good.³⁴¹ Socrates introduces the idea of the good in the context of the “greatest studies” that the future philosophers will engage in (503e, 504e-505a). In this context, he reminds Adeimantus of his earlier statement that their reasoning about the soul has been of insufficient precision (504a-b; cf. 435c-d). He declares that the true guardian of the city will have to “go the longer way around” that they avoided, and he must gain the precise knowledge that they, in their conversation, did not attain. This knowledge is knowledge of the idea of the good. Every other thing or practice, Socrates claims, including justice, is beneficial only when it is done or used under the guidance of knowledge of the good (504e-505b). The idea of the good is not easy to discover: the many say it is pleasure, though they also grant that there are bad pleasures;³⁴² the “more refined” say that the good is prudence, but when asked what the prudence concerns, they end up saying “the good” (505b-c). Nonetheless, the good “is what every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does everything” (505d). Many human beings would be content to possess the mere appearance of justice or nobility, but with the good they want the truth (505d). (That is, they do not want to *seem* happy but to *be* happy.) Despite the elusiveness of the good, true guardians will have to discover it in order to know the truth about why the just and noble things are good, so that they can put that knowledge to work governing the city (505d-506b). The education of the philosopher (described 521c-539d) has as its goal the turning of the future philosopher’s “whole soul” away from the sensible particulars of

³⁴¹ See 507a-511e; cf. Bloom 1991, pp. 401-02.

³⁴² Cf. *Gorgias* 495a-500a.

this world towards the purely intelligible forms illuminated by the idea of the good (see 518-519d).

Having taken Glaucon and Adeimantus this far, however, Socrates refuses to give them his true opinion concerning the good (506d-e),³⁴³ and instead speaks to them through the images of the sun, the line, and the cave. Socrates thus draws attention once again to the deficiency of their previous reasoning, but does not correct it. The soul and its good are not directly explained in the *Republic*, which means that the definitions of justice and the other virtues, in addition to the account of the soul, remain at the level of hypothesis.³⁴⁴

Despite this, Socrates succeeds in convincing them that the life of the philosopher is the best of human lives (see, for example, 516a-e, and 540a-c). The superiority of the philosophic life in fact proves to be ultimate reason why philosophers would be the best rulers in the city.³⁴⁵ According to Socrates, philosophers find their happiness solely in the contemplation of the objects of the intelligible realm, and look down on the good and pursuits of ordinary life (see 516c-e). Hence, they have no concern for the goods that can be gotten by injustice. In addition, they are the “least eager to rule” (520b), because they do not regard political rule as a source of benefits for themselves. They “despise (*kataphronounta*) political offices” (521b). In any city other than Callipolis, they would rightfully avoid actively contributing to the public welfare (520a-b). In Callipolis, however, Socrates argues that they would recognize the justice of the city’s claim on

³⁴³ He discounts having knowledge of it, see 506c.

³⁴⁴ Indeed, the soul may have more than three “parts”; see 443d, 580e-581c.

³⁴⁵ See Strauss 1964, pp. 122, 127-28; see also Bloom 1991, pp. 395-96, 411.

them (520b-e). The city has raised them and reared them in the life of the philosopher; in return for this gift, philosophers will do their part (when called) by ruling the city; but they consider rule something “necessary” (*anagkaion*), not something noble (540a-b). In sum, since the philosophers find no personal profit or satisfaction in rule or the benefits accessible to rulers, since they find their highest good in contemplation, they are capable of being “rulers in the precise sense.”

The consequence of this line of reasoning is, as Bloom (1991, p. 411) has pointed out, that justice conceived of as devotion to the common good is *not* good in itself; it is only necessary (as Socrates said at 347a-e). Socrates therefore cannot praise ordinary justice as Glaucon and Adeimantus wished. They do not notice this, however. Partly this is because Socrates’ claim does come across as a praise of justice, since he is arguing that philosophers are above injustice. Ultimately, however, the revelation that ordinary justice is not intrinsically profitable either evades or does not disappoint the brothers because the life of the philosopher and the redefinition of justice as the good order of the soul present something that *can* be praised as they wished justice to be praised. As we remarked above, what they were really asking Socrates to give them was an account of the human good that transcends the limitations of the objects or pursuits commonly valued which give the critics of justice their ammunition.

Socrates has given this to them—though only in images. It must be remembered that his reasoning here (and before) is not demonstrative. The idea of the good, which is needed to explain the true nature of the soul and of virtue, is left obscure. Because the idea of the good lies at the heart of the philosopher’s essential activity (according to

Socrates), the life of the philosopher is also left obscure. His happiness may be true happiness, but we are given only images with which to discern what that happiness is.

2.4. The Superiority of Justice (VIII-X)

The final comparison between the lives of the perfectly unjust and of the just comes after Socrates' account of the genesis, character, and decline of regimes from Callipolis to timocracy to oligarchy to democracy to tyrant, with his parallel account of the souls analogous to each (Book VIII). Despite the praise of justice already delivered, the comparison remains necessary. As Pappas (2003, pp. 96-97) has remarked, in Book IV Socrates established that justice is the good order of the soul, but only in Book IX does he present arguments for the proposition that the well-ordered soul is happiest. (The analogy between virtue and health is suggestive but proves nothing.) In addition, the discussion in Book IV had left us wondering why it is that a psychically just person would be just in the ordinary sense—or, alternatively, why a tyrant cannot be psychically just. In the subsequent books we got part of the answer. A psychically just person will also be just in the ordinary sense because the psychically just person is the philosopher, and philosophers have nothing to gain from injustice. In this section, we will consider Socrates' further arguments on this score, which will lead us to our conclusions regarding how and to what extent Socrates can defend the life of justice.

Socrates' proofs of the superiority of justice to injustice come at the end of a long account of the decline of regimes and souls (543a-576b). This is the story of how the

better parts of the soul (or city)³⁴⁶ become subordinated to progressively worse parts of the soul: reason to spirit (the timocratic man, 549c-550b); spirit to fear and greed (the oligarchic man, 553a-e); the frugal desires to the superfluous and indiscriminate (the democratic man, 558c-561c); and, finally, the law-abiding desires to *eros* (the tyrannical man, 571a-573c). Thus, even before the comparison of the just and unjust lives, the pinnacle of injustice—the tyrant’s life—has been made to look very unattractive. He is described as a base and unscrupulous slave to his own infinite, insatiable, frenzied appetites (572b-576b), drunken (573b), deranged (573c), and lawless (573a-b, 573d-575a). This tyrant hardly resembles the tyrant invoked by Thrasymachus (343e-344c) or the perfectly unjust man invoked by Glaucon (360e-361b, 362b-c) or Adeimantus (365b-d).³⁴⁷ Nonetheless, just as Socrates defends a conception of justice other than the one Glaucon and Adeimantus had asked for, Socrates compares the life of the just man with an account of the life of a tyrant other than the kind the brothers invoked. This has been made possible by the shift to the topic of the soul and the possibilities opened up by the city-soul analogy.

Once the tyrannical man has been described, Socrates offers three proofs for the superiority of the just life to the unjust life (576b-588a).³⁴⁸ The first proof (576b-580c), like the definition of justice in Book IV, relies upon the city-soul analogy. The analogy of soul to city suggests that, “as city is to city with respect to virtue and happiness, so is man to man” (576d). The tyrannized city is obviously the worst and most wretched,

³⁴⁶ In my account, I will focus on Socrates’ discussion of the men corresponding to the regimes and not the regimes.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Annas 1981, p. 304.

³⁴⁸ For an extended treatment of the proofs, see Annas 1981, pp. 305-20, and Irwin 1995, pp. 281-97; cf. Bloom 1991, pp. 424-25.

according to Glaucon (576d-e). The tyrant is certainly the worst man, but is he also the most wretched? Socrates suggests that they “pretend” (577b) that they are qualified to answer this question (which requires intimate knowledge of the tyrant’s soul) (576e-577b). To carry out the investigation, they apply the city-soul analogy. The tyrannized city is the most enslaved; the city under tyranny least does what it wants; it is poor and full of fear and lamentations. Hence, by analogy, the tyrant’s soul as well is enslaved, confined, full of regret, poor, insatiable, and full of fear and lamentation (577c-578a). Socrates adds that the tyrannical soul that achieves actual tyranny in some city is the most wretched of all, since he adds to his internal misfortunes the external misfortunes of being surrounded on all sides by enemies and forced to flatter worthless men in order to survive (578b-580a).

On the basis of these considerations, Glaucon announces (to mock fanfare) that the case is closed and that the just life is far superior to the unjust life, regardless of its rewards, reputations, or external consequences (580a-c). Of course, the method of argument is invalid. Socrates himself indicates that one cannot mechanically apply the analogy in this manner. In fact, the persuasiveness of this proof lies entirely in his success in persuading Glaucon that the tyrant’s soul is governed by the base and insatiable desires. If that description had not already been given, the inferences based on the city-soul analogy would have appeared much more arbitrary. After all, it may be clear that it is wretched to be the inhabitant of a tyrannized city, but that does not mean that it is wretched to be the one doing the tyrannizing.³⁴⁹ This proof is therefore no more

³⁴⁹ See Bloom 1991, p. 423.

persuasive than the city-soul analogy as a whole is—and that analogy, by Socrates' own admission, is questionable (see, again, 504a-b; cf. 435c-d).

Socrates adds two more proofs after this. They shift ground in three ways.

Neither of them relies on the city-soul analogy directly. Second, they explicitly compare the tyrant to the philosopher rather than to the just man, suggesting that the philosopher is the only person with a truly well-ordered soul. And both of them prove the superiority of philosophy to tyranny on the ground that the philosophic life provides the greatest and purest pleasure.

The second proof (580c-583a) works by adding a new dimension to the account of the tripartite soul. Socrates asserts that each part of the soul has its own proper desire, object of desire, and pleasure in attaining that object. The calculating part pursues and takes pleasure in learning and wisdom. The spirited part pursues and takes pleasure in honor and victory. And the manifold lowest part (which used to be the only part characterized in terms of desire) pursues and takes pleasure in “gain.” A person's character is determined by which part predominates. Hence, there are gain-loving people, honor-loving people, and wisdom-loving people (580d-581c). These different types of people dispute with one another over which life is most pleasant, since each thinks that it is his own (581e-582a). To judge correctly between them, Socrates says, one needs experience, prudence, and argument; but the lover of wisdom (the philosopher) is superior in all three areas; therefore, since he chooses the philosophic life, it is the most pleasant (582a-583a).

This argument is perhaps the most decisive, since it rests on the choice of someone who has the experience and judgment necessary to make the right decision. Unfortunately, anyone who is not a philosopher is to take it on authority, since only the philosopher (it seems) chooses justice on the basis of knowledge.

The final proof (583b-588a) argues that the philosophic life is the most pleasant because the pleasures associated with knowledge are the only true pleasures because they are not associated with pains and fully real because the objects of knowledge are the most real things (585a-b). Most people do not realize this because they know only the pleasures of the body. These pleasures are not true pleasures; they are only repose (*hēsuxia*) from pain. They appear pleasurable because of their proximity to that pain (583b-585a). The many live a bestial life enslaved to the false pleasures of the body (586a-b). For the man who lives by the guidance of reason, all three parts of his soul get their correct, measured, and best fulfillment, while the person who is controlled by one of the other parts does not (586c-587a). Since the tyrannical life is the one furthest removed from the rule of argument (and “law and order”), while the kingly life is the least distant (because not distant at all), it follows that the kingly man will live the most pleasant life, partaking the most in the truest pleasures and the least in the false one, while the life of the tyrant will be the least pleasant, partaking of no true pleasures at all (587a-b).

This argument, like the last one, is necessarily based on authority, since one must have experience of the philosophic pleasures that Socrates is talking about in order to judge it. It is also based on the obscure claim that the pleasures of the mind are more “real” because their objects are. That seems to treat knowledge as though it is

“consumed,” but “digesting” knowledge is only metaphorical. Finally, the argument that the tyrant is most removed from rational self-rule is premised on the account of the tyrant offered earlier; since it is unlikely that every tyrant has possessed such a soul, this proof does not establish that actual tyrants must be so far removed from the philosopher on the scales of pleasure. In sum, the real “proof” offered in these two arguments is simply Socrates’ assertion that the philosopher is wiser than the tyrant and does not want to be a tyrant, and, since the philosopher is just, this proves that the just life is more choiceworthy.

After the three proofs, Socrates offers one final comparison of the just and the unjust soul—offered in the form of an image of the soul (588b-592b). He asks Glaucon to think of a man as the outward shape of a man containing inside itself a smaller man, a lion, and a many-headed hydra of wild and tame snakes (588b-e). Injustice is represented as the chaotic rule of the serpents and the lion over the man, while justice is represented as the rule of the man over the serpents with the aid of the lion.

Having provided this image, Socrates finally explains a puzzle that has remained with us since the *Gorgias*: given the difference between how Socrates defines justice and how justice is ordinarily conceived of, and given the critique of ordinary justice implicit in Socrates’ purported defense of it, why does Socrates take pains to create the impression that his arguments fully vindicate the ordinary conception? Socrates now explains the purpose of the law and of the opinions concerning the noble and base things that the law

communicates.³⁵⁰ Put briefly, Socrates argues that the law persuades or forces unreasonable people to act reasonably (589c-591a). All of the activities that the law (or convention, *nomos*) censures or prohibits are ones that cause the many-headed snake to take control of the soul and force reason out of its place of rule.³⁵¹ Since the many are incapable of rational self-rule, the law comes in as an ally of reason and guards over and guides them in their activities. (The wise, it is implied, do not need laws.) It does not render them truly just, of course, but it keeps them just (for the most part) in their outward behavior and thereby keeps them from indulging even more in activities that promote the domination of their soul by indiscriminate, insatiable bodily desires.

This argument suggests that Socrates creates the impression that his defense of psychic justice vindicates ordinary justice because, in a limited sense, it does. Socrates does not prove that a person who is outwardly just is necessarily psychically just as a result.³⁵² Hence, he does not prove that justice in the ordinary sense is profitable in the manner that Glaucon and Adeimantus wished. But justice in the ordinary sense does maintain conditions within which individuals are able to satisfy their “necessary” desires, as well as those beneficial desires that go beyond bodily necessity. And, to some extent, it cultivates habits that make people who are incapable of psychic justice at least capable of self-control and free of the consequences of unbridled desires. In this last respect, one can say that the private practice of ordinary justice is profitable to the doer—provided

³⁵⁰ Given everything that Socrates has said about the madness (496c-d), unreason (492b-d), and even bestiality (586a-b) of ordinary political life, it likely that Socrates is exaggerating here by attributing these things to the *purpose* of the law rather than the *effect* of the law.

³⁵¹ Socrates lists as things that *nomos* blames: theft, licentiousness (*to akolastainein*), stubbornness, bad temper, luxury, softness, flattery, illiberality, and the manual arts (589c-591a).

³⁵² Hence, Sachs’s (1963) charge is, to that extent, correct. Sachs does not entertain the possibility that Socrates might knowingly fail because his task is impossible.

that Socrates is correct about the preeminence of the good of the soul and the limited benefits from bodily and external goods.

After the discussion of poetry (595a-608b),³⁵³ and the proof of the soul's immortality (608c-612b), Socrates brings back into the discussion what Glaucon and Adeimantus had forbidden: the rewards that the just receive because of their reputation for justice (612b-614a), and the rewards that the just receive from the gods in the afterlife (the Myth of Er, 614a-621d).³⁵⁴ Besides a plausible but not decisive explanation of why crime does not pay (613b-e), the final part of the *Republic* adds one significant detail to the discussion of justice. When Socrates describes the souls choosing their future lives, the choice made by the first person suggests that even the most decent citizens are tyrants at heart because of their lack of philosophy (see 619b-e; cf. 548a-c). This serves to confirm the claim that the critique of justice is based on the same conception of the good as the ordinary understanding of justice—or, otherwise put, that the seeds of injustice are sown within the conception of the good presupposed by the ordinary understanding of justice.

3. Conclusion

At the end of the previous chapter, we reviewed the status of the problem of justice in light of the *Gorgias* and the first book of the *Republic*. Briefly, we saw the following things. Justice is understood by all to consist essentially in fairness or

³⁵³ In which *logos* and *nomos* are again equated; see 604a-d.

³⁵⁴ I have left out Socrates' reprisal (591a-b) of the *Gorgias*' argument that it is more profitable to be punished for one's injustice than to get away with it. The *Republic*'s argument does not differ from that of the *Gorgias*.

refraining from *pleonexia* (benefiting oneself at the expense of others). Hence, justice consists in self-limitation with regard to the pursuit of one's self-interest. In addition, we saw that critics and defenders of justice alike shared the same basic conception of the goods that make up happiness. As a result, the critics of justice appeared more consistent, since the defenders failed to offer any satisfactory reason why a person should refrain from committing injustice, in those circumstances where he has the power to get away with it, in pursuit of the goods that constitute happiness.³⁵⁵

In the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus, we have seen this critique stated in its purest form, as well as the origin of this critique in a critical examination of traditional authoritative opinions concerning the gods and human virtue. We also saw that they recognized that a true defense of justice as a virtue (rather than a sometimes necessary, sometimes dispensable evil) required a rethinking of the soul and its good.

At the end of the last chapter, we also reviewed Socrates' responses to the criticisms delivered by Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus. We noted that Socrates' defenses of justice had two prominent features in common. First, they were predicated on a revision of the conception of the human good, a revision which makes the good order of the soul (or the right functioning of the soul) necessary for happiness. Second, by naming this good order of the soul "justice," Socrates implied that injustice (*pleonexia*) is incompatible with the good order of the soul and, hence, with happiness. Since the ordinary conception of justice and the critics of justice share the same basic conception of the good, Socrates' argument doubles as a critique both of the critics and of

³⁵⁵ Consult the conclusion of chapter four for greater detail.

ordinary opinion. This fact suggested that Socrates defends justice in the manner he does because justice ordinarily conceived is not defensible on its own terms because it neglects the good of the soul. Finally, we noted that Socrates created the impression that his arguments prove the superiority of justice ordinarily conceived, even though he provided no explicit, convincing argument for identifying ordinary justice with justice in the sense of the good order of the soul.

In sum, under the guise of defending justice, Socrates raises the question of the soul and the human good, asserts that the attainment of the soul's good is necessary to the attainment of happiness, and asserts that pursuit and enjoyment of the soul's good is incompatible with the practice of injustice as it is ordinarily conceived (*pleonexia*). That is the heart of Socrates' critique of injustice.

Our consideration of the *Republic* has allowed us to fill in some gaps in Socrates' defense of justice. The *Republic* presents a more detailed account of the soul, and it explicitly ties the value of justice to that of philosophy. In this way, the good order of the soul becomes more comprehensible insofar as it is determined in light of requirements of the pursuit of wisdom. This defense implies, therefore, that very few people are truly just—or, alternatively, that very few people are truly free of all temptations to commit injustice. On the other hand, Socrates has argued that injustice is not truly beneficial to anyone—hence the importance of the law, and hence the limitation of its authority and accomplishment.

Nonetheless, as the *Republic* ends, one cannot escape the conclusion that the defense of justice it offers remains incomplete because the nature of the soul and its good

are never brought clearly to light.³⁵⁶ We are told that the philosophic life is best, but the only example we see of someone living that life is Socrates in his own narration. As Socrates himself has said (435c-d and 504a-b), true knowledge of virtue and its benefits (and, hence, of justice and its benefits) depends on true knowledge of the soul and of the “idea of the good,” and knowledge of the soul, Socrates’ statements suggest, depends upon knowledge of the idea of the good. Socrates refuses, however, to discuss the idea of the good directly. In doing so, he leaves the defense of justice radically incomplete, though he provides the outline of what an adequate defense of justice would have to account for and the questions it would have to address.

³⁵⁶ See Strauss 1964, pp. 137-38, and Bloom 1991, p. 378.

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